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Mircea Eliade : meanings (the apparent dichotomy: scientist/writer).

Popoaca-Giuran, Anca

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MIRCEA ELIADE - MEANINGS

THE APPARENT DICHOTOMY: *SCIENTIST*/WRITER

ANCA POPOACA-GIURAN

PhD

**THE DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS
STUDIES, KING'S COLLEGE**

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MIRCEA ELIADE - MEANINGS

THE APPARENT DICHOTOMY SCIENTIST / WRITER

ABSTRACT

This thesis represents a new 'tool' for a special hermeneutic of Mircea Eliade's writings. Its function is to analyse his fiction with the help of his academic studies, and it attempts to prove the influence of the latter upon the former. Although theoretical studies on this subject have been published, no real endeavour to prove this influence has been done. In a way, this thesis is a response to an academic need. On the other hand, the entire oeuvre of Eliade constitutes not only a vast field of research in itself, but an 'opener' of original paths and theories. This leads to the need to bring into play new terms (e.g. 'personal hierophanies', 'chronophanies', 'diastimophanies' etc.), new concepts (e.g. the quadrifold structure of the labyrinth: psychological, philosophical, metaphysical and mythical), theories (e.g. on the evolution of the symbolic language, on the linear or circular structure of the labyrinth) and parallels (e.g. between the myths of Orpheus and Dionysus; between the works of Nae Ionescu and Mircea Eliade). During the whole thesis, our main aim was to preserve a balance between the scholarly writings of Eliade and his fiction. This accounts for our undertaking to keep critical references to the minimum. It is our hope that the present thesis proves that the dichotomy of the Eliadean oeuvre is only an apparent one, and his academic works put their imprint on his literary creations.

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FOREWORD

This thesis was written with the intent of not only putting a specific body of materials at the specialist's disposal (a textual comparison of the academic and the literary writings of Eliade had not yet been done because part of his fiction had not been translated from Romanian), but also to answer certain questions that his oeuvre raises. The structure of the thesis presents itself as an 'initiatory' journey through the labyrinth of Eliade's writings. This is the reason why *we* have tried to maintain throughout a balance between his two main modes of expression. The path is strewn not with dangers (like the one of the archaic hero) but with varied themes: archetypal lines and symbols, Romanian reference points, universal myths and motifs, academic concepts. Eliade's entire work is an *opera aperta*, and consequently one cannot claim to be exhaustive. *We* have just endeavoured to propose to the reader a short journey through religions, psychology, politics, literature and philosophy, under Eliade's guidance. This periplus is also envisaged by *us* as having the function of a homage to the multilateral personality of Mircea Eliade.

We would like to express *our* greatest gratitude to our supervisors, Dr Julian Baldick and Dr Vanessa L. Davies, without whose help, encouragement and invaluable observations *we* would not have completed the present work. *We are* particularly grateful to Dr Julian Baldick for the materials he gave us and for his continuous support, and to Dr Vanessa L. Davies for her enthusiasm, which prompted the undertaking of our project in the first place. *We* also offer *our* most sincere thanks to Mrs Heide Whyte and the library team of Middlesex University, Enfield, who enabled *us* to consult material from the British Library. *We are* indebted to all those who, at different stages, revised

our English and especially to Duncan and Gina Milroy and Mihai Ion Giuran who devoted much time to help *us* finish the thesis in its present form. *We* should also mention here the constant support of our former Romanian teacher, Maria Cogălniceanu, and *our* former colleague, Adam Michaelson for his assistance in the field of information technology. To all of them, *our* warmest gratitude.

PRELIMINARY NOTES

Anyone immersed in the vastness of the Eliadean oeuvre can remark the relationship uniting his volumes. Mircea Eliade himself always insisted upon the consideration of his work as a whole. Some compositions are relevant to others in either a direct way or a general way, while recurrent characters or very similar ones appear in distinct literary pieces. The book titled The Quest - History and Meaning in Religion, which highlights the identity between two literary key characters: 'la Vedova' (from 'At Dionysus' Court') and Madonna Intelligenza (from 'Dayan'), is an example of the influence exerted in a **direct way**. Eliade's studies in From Zalmoxis to Genghis Khan (e.g. the chapters about Zalmoxis and *Miorița*) are pivotal in understanding certain episodes from the novel The Forbidden Forest, while certain analyses from Myth and Reality (e.g. that of the amnesia of Matsyendranāth) are responsible for the meaning of the central theme in Nineteen Roses. In a **general way** Eliade's writings on eschatology are essential for comprehending the novella 'Dayan', while those on yoga shed light upon stories like: 'Nights at Serampore' and 'The Secret of Dr Honigberger'. Sometimes questions from one book are answered in another one, such as, to give but one example, the famous riddle from 'With the Gypsy Girls' which is solved in 'At Dionysus' Court'. Apart from recurrent characters in disparate works (e.g.: Albini, Ieronim Thanase, Maria Da Maria), there appear what we shall call 'mirrored characters', symbolically identical pairs: **Oana** ('The Old Man and the Bureaucrats' and **Cucoanes** ('A Great Man'); **Dayan** ('Dayan') and **Dominic Matei** ('Youth without Youth'); **Ileana** (The Forbidden Forest) and **Euridice** (Nineteen Roses); **Gavrilescu** ('With the Gypsy Girls') and **Iancu Gore** ('Twelve Thousand Head of Cattle'); **Mavrodin** ('Stone Diviner')

and **Doftorul** ('The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'); **Leana** ('At Dionysus' Court') and **Niculina** (Nineteen Roses).

These comparative aspects form only one of the thesis' frameworks, which is organized as a double periplus (scholarly/literary) through different aspects of Eliade's oeuvre: recurrent archetypal lines and symbols, myths and motifs (Romanian and universal), essential concepts (the 'degradation' of myths, the Sacred/Profane relationship), parallels (Nae Ionescu - Mircea Eliade). Several parts of the present work explain particular aspects dealing with the Romanian background of the author (e.g. the importance given by Eliade to the myth from the fairy tale 'Youth without Old Age and Life without Death'). We also tried to open different doors for future researchers, doors that could lead to specific paths (e.g. the chapter dealing with Symbolism) or enrich the cognitive levels of the Eliadean compositions. For the sake of clarity we introduced new concepts and terms and we ^{have} re-expressed personal theories (e.g. the 'evolution' of the 'symbolic' language). Making evident the religious structure of a writer's literary imagination could be, in the last instance, an analysis that enters the psychological domain, but also places the artistic texts concerned within the sphere of universal values.

RECURRENT ARCHETYPAL LINES AND ESSENTIAL SYMBOLS IN ELIADE'S LITERATURE

Motto: Symbolic thought makes the immediate reality 'shine', but without diminishing or devaluating it: in its perspective the Universe is not closed, no object is isolated in its own existentialness; everything holds together in a closed system of correspondences and assimilations.

(Mircea Eliade, Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts, p.6)

Given the fact that Eliade's oeuvre, in its entirety, is situated on co-ordinates that suppose at least a symbolical element (with a mythological frame), the need to decipher and establish the order of the respective elements is a natural product of the central place held by the symbols. Analysing some of the most frequent archetypal lines that appear in Eliade's literary writings, we shall look at the interpretations given by different researchers, expressing - where appropriate - our own point of view. Ultimately, in the critique of Eliade's fiction, we favour the particular *acceptation* that the historian of religions himself ascribed to certain symbols/archetypal lines in his scientific works. It is our belief that, consciously or not, Eliade provided the reader of his literary books with a 'decoder' in his own academic writings. René Guénon notices¹ that as language itself is nothing other than symbolism, there can be no opposition, therefore, between the use of words and the use of figurative symbols. He showed that these two modes of expression should be complementary one to another. In his narrative, Eliade *did* precisely that: he brought to the 'surface' the hidden, symbolical meaning of the words, integrating the concept expressed by

¹ René Guénon, Fundamental Symbols - The Universal Language of Sacred Science (Cambridge, Quinta Essentia, 1995), p.13.

them in a whole system of connotations. For example, the 'initiated' reader could perceive the symbolic quality even of a simple word like 'coffee'. As the symbol is 'open'², 'coffee' could signify: black magic, occult powers, the 'profane' equivalent of a divine drink (e.g. *soma* or *ambrosia*; inferno - if hot; transcendence or death - if cold). It is the context and the reader's level of understanding that bestow different meanings to the same word-symbol. And, as with any symbol, underneath the different layers of interpretation there is an ultimate, immutable signification that transcends space and time. The role of symbolism is considered by René Guénon useful for all people, as it helps them to understand the truths in question 'more or less completely and more or less profoundly, each according to the nature of his intellectual possibilities'³. For him the highest truths can be communicated only by their incorporation into symbols 'which will hide them from many, no doubt, but which will manifest them in all their splendour to the eyes of those who can see'⁴. This is precisely what Eliade does: through his whole literature he first teaches his readers to 'see' (that is understand) inside the words, in order to broaden their perception of the world, hidden in the profane appearances ^{since} nature 'put the mask of the visible over the invisible' (V. Hugo). If the 'world is like a divine language for those who know how to understand it'⁵, Eliade re-constructed the 'divine' role of the language by giving back to the words their 'open' function, that is their full symbolic quality.

In order to illustrate the mechanism used by Eliade we took as an example the Japanese language, which still preserves an intermediary

²... the symbol makes a concrete object "explode" by disclosing dimensions which are not given in immediate experience'. Mircea Eliade, Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts, ed. by Diane Apostolos- Cappelletti (New York, Crossroad, 1985), p.13.

³René Guénon, Fundamental Symbols..., p.14.

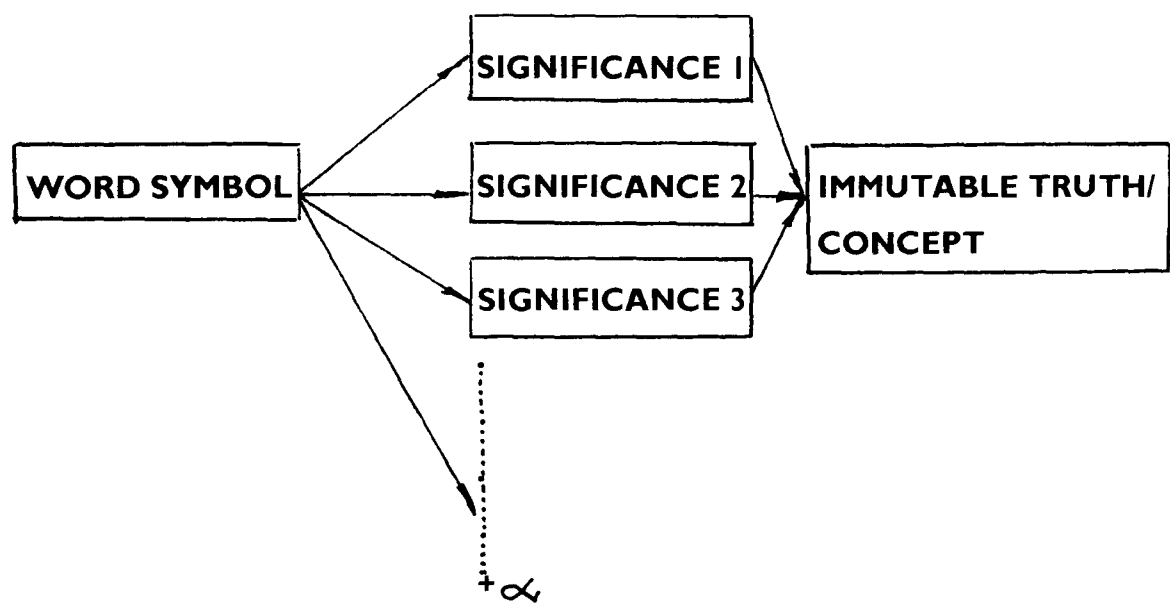
⁴ibid., p.14.

⁵ibid., p.15.

phase of development between its archaic organisation and a newer, more explicit one. The split between the primordial role of the language and its contemporary use could clearly be shown. The 'degradation' of Japanese language is evident in the use of five or six different words employed to express the same reality/concept (according to various degrees of formality) while the word-symbol from which the significations emerged is missing. A comparison between the archaic structure of the meanings that started from a word-symbol and today's Japanese language, which preserves specific archaic attributes (e.g. there are more words expressing the same thing, in different circumstances) could lead to the conclusion that in fact a certain significance of the symbol pertained to a certain level of understanding through which a person perceived the world, and this level was expressed by the person's status. A person's status, being directly related to the degrees of formality, has the result that the contemporary Japanese formal word(I) is equivalent to the significancel(I) of the archaic word-symbol, the formal word(2) is equivalent to the significancel(2) and so on. To put it simply, each member of the community took from the word the very meaning that suited his/her cultural elevation and it is probably this phenomenon that originally gave rise to the richness of symbolism. If intelligence resides, as some modern psychologists assert, in the capacity to make connections between apparently disparate things, we could understand the superior condition of the archaic man that not only dealt with comparisons all the time, but had a whole system in which everything (from a cosmic to a spiritual level) could become interchangeable. The more meanings a person could find to a symbol, the higher his/her status in the group. It is later only that a formal word acquired an unique, well-defined meaning. Previously this

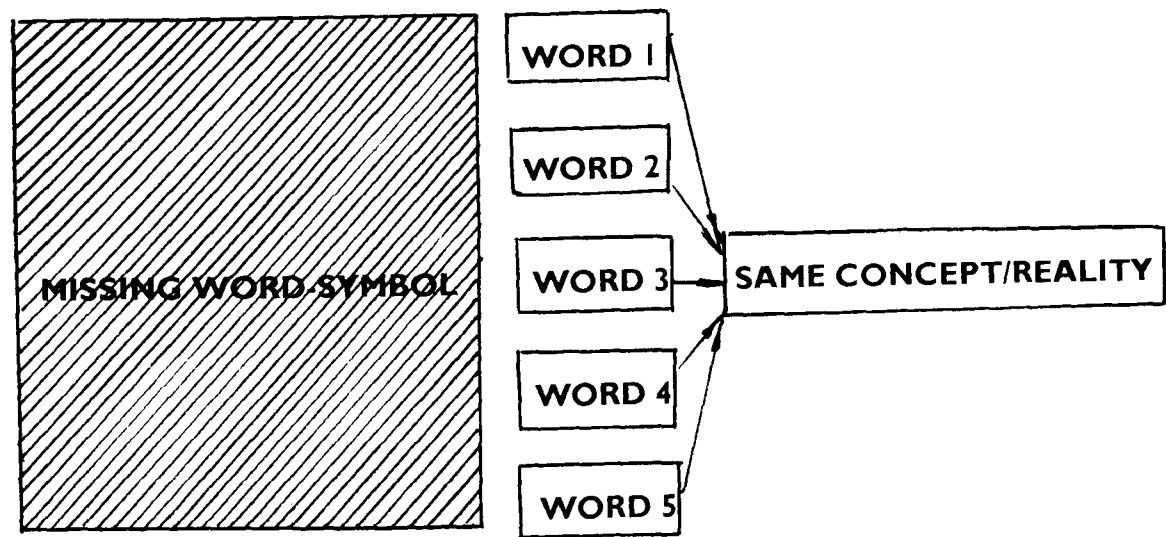
was just one of the many understandings of a concept. The schema we draw as an example, shows this shift:

Archaic function of the language



Contemporary function of the language

DEGREES OF FORMALITY

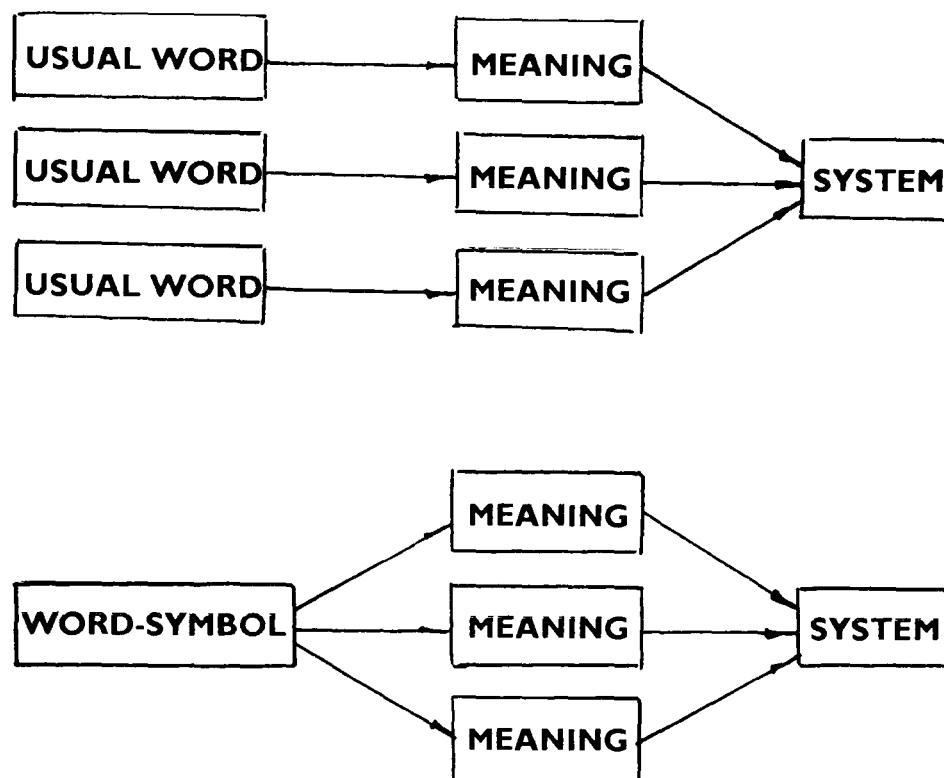


In Eliade's fiction it is precisely the archaic function of the language that is employed, whereby a single word-symbol has multiple significances that stem from a single immutable truth or concept. The technique reminds one of the 'crepuscular language', employed for example in Indian religious writings, according to which the text could have at least three interpretations (vulgar, mystical, erotic); of the erotic/mystic interpretations of the Bible or of the infinite variety of readings employed by the Kabbalah. In order to restore the multiple readings of one single text, Eliade made use in his fiction of the symbolic function of certain words. We could say that he formed 'a language within a language'. Along with other researchers, the historian of religions himself acknowledged the identity symbol=language:

... the symbol itself may be considered as a language which, although conceptual, is nevertheless capable of expressing a coherent thought on existence and on the World. The symbol reveals a pre-systematic ontology to us, which is to say an expression of thought from a period when conceptual vocabularies had not yet been constituted.⁶

By using word-symbols in his literary works Eliade reached deeper levels of the psyché in a more diversified way and one more synthetic than the 'usual' words could reach. The following simple schema on the next page shows this:

⁶Eliade, Symbolism..., p.3.



By not using words susceptible of a single meaning, but word-symbols with an infinity of meanings, it can be said that Eliade rediscovers the sacred function of writing: to **reveal and hide** at the same time. That is why his fiction needs a special type of 'translation', similar to the Persian poetry he studied in his youth. For this purpose we group the types of the word-symbols he used, into two main groups: **I) typical** (meaningful in themselves) and **II) atypical** (the context gives the meaning). The first category is the most complex, and we divide it into two subgroups, consisting of **1. the sacred** and **2. the ritual words and expressions**. The sacred words in their turn can be divided into what we call 'hierophanic words' (making manifest some modality of the sacred), 'kratophanic words' (manifestations of power) and 'epiphanic words' (standing for manifestations of the Supreme Being). The table below gives some examples:

WORD-SYMBOLS

<p>I <u>TYPICAL</u></p>
<p>I. SACRED</p>
<p>Hierophanic expressions: 'guide', 'gold', 'moon', 'stars', 'love', 'labyrinth', 'Grail', 'stone', 'hot'/'cold', 'wedding', 'shadow', etc.</p>
<p>Kratophanic expressions: 'thunderbolt', 'giant', 'sea', 'fire' etc.</p>
<p>Epiphanic expressions: 'mule', 'walking over waters', 'lilies', 'Paradise', 'serpent', 'rose', 'beach', 'tree', 'road', 'garden', etc.</p>
<p>2. RITUAL WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS:</p> <p>'round', 'drum', 'dancing', 'mirror', 'diviner', 'Gypsy', 'flight', 'prayer', 'painting', 'monk', 'wine', 'cellar', 'mask'/'gloves', summer solstice', 'church', 'playwright', 'blind', etc.</p>
<p>II <u>ATYPICAL:</u></p> <p>'coffee', 'house', 'watch', 'lamp', 'book', vase', etc.</p>

The 'atypical words' are the most controversial, as they change their meaning according to the context and the spiritual level of the reader. What is essential, though, is that they always preserve this quality of connoting something other than their immediate meaning.

At the end of this short introduction we have to mention that many important archetypal lines and symbols (like: heat and fire; dance; gloves; vehicle; number three; circle and mandala; tree and wood; painter; musician; coffee, etc.), although recurrent in Eliade's work, are not tackled here, as space did not allow. Also, our aim is focused on highlighting different aspects of Eliade's oeuvre (not only its symbolism) and opening the path for future researchers who, we hope, will make a glossary of Eliadean terms⁷. Furthermore, we did not feel the need to expose here the theories on symbolism expressed by the historian of religions himself, as these are fully explained in his books and studies. For those interested we can recommend specific titles: Patterns in Comparative Religion, The History of Religions - Essays in Methodology (edited by M. Eliade and J.M. Kitagawa), Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts (edited by Diane Apostolos-Cappadona), The Sacred and the Profane, The Two and the One.

⁷A dictionary of symbols already appeared in Romania. See Doina Ruști, Dicționar de Simboluri în opera lui Mircea Eliade (Bucharest, Ed. Coresi, 1997).

THE DEVIL / DOUBLE; MAGICIAN; WITCH; VAMPIRE-WOMAN

THE DEVIL

Motto: The Devil is a creator as vast as God himself. If the Devil were not great and real, our life wouldn't have any meaning.

(Mircea Eliade, Isabel și apele diavolului, p.47)

In two of his scientific writings: The Myth of Reintegration and The Two and the One, Eliade examines the central role occupied by the image of the Devil in the folklore of different countries. The comparative method allowed him to draw the conclusion¹ that the need to give a main place to the Devil, next to God existed in a widespread area, among populations of Central Asia and in an Europe which had already been Christian and Muslim for a long time. The historian of religions also remarked ^{upon} the fact that in many beliefs the Devil represents an answer to the Creator's loneliness and a certain 'sympathy' between these two divine Beings is present.

Servant, collaborator or supreme adviser to God, the Devil is at the same time **destructive** and **creative**. In the cosmogonic myths analysed by Eliade, He takes part in Creation, next to Divinity. Even the Old Testament hints at an after-Fall 're-Creation' of Man and the

¹ Mircea Eliade, Mefistofel și Androginul (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1995), p.80.

World, 're-Creation' triggered by the Devil's initiation. It is this very activity of Satan as **initiator** that interests Eliade, not only in his scientific writings, but in his fiction as well. Analysing Goethe's Faust he emphasizes Mephistopheles' role in stimulating human activity: 'Mephistopheles stimulates Life. He fights against the Good, but in the end he makes the Good. This demon who denies Life is nevertheless a collaborator of God'². Also, in his book on Shamanism, Mircea Eliade studies the initiation powers of the Devil in the shamanistic rituals. Thus, the 'first shaman' of the Tunguz of Turukhansk created himself, 'by his own powers and with the help of the devil'³, while among the Yakut, the old shaman adjures the new disciple 'to renounce God and all that he holds dear, and makes him promise to devote his whole life to the "devil", in return for which the latter will fulfil all his wishes.'⁴. Raymond de Becker classified the images of the Devil and Magician in the paternal or male series, which is part of the father archetype, the Devil representing 'une imago paternelle dont le rêveur a peur'⁵. Eliade explored the richness of the Devil's symbolism in his fiction and under precisely this **paternal image** Satan appears in one of his parable-stories: 'I, the Holy Devil and the Sixteen Puppets'. The story is about a king who led his life under the guidance of the Devil, who had taught him the art of 'creative imagination' to the point of perfection. While isolated from the 'real' world outside his palace (because of his great riches and wisdom), the king is entertained by the company of sixteen strange golem-characters, conceived by the Devil's imagination. The relationship king-Devil is one of disciple-mentor, and the youth's confession reveals a spiritual bond that touches devotional accents:

²ibid., p.73.

³Mircea Eliade, Shamanism - Archaic techniques of ecstasy (London, Arkana, 1989), p.68.

⁴ibid., p.113.

⁵Raymond de Becker, Interprétez vos rêves (Paris, N.O.E. 1969), p.126.

In the beginning I was afraid of his companionship. My body was trembling with emotion and I was pressing my palms against my eyes. But soon, the Devil became the most never-failing friend. He used to come every time loneliness tortured me and disappear at my slightest sign. The hours spent together, the hours in which he offered exquisite thoughts to my mind and obscure, strange, foolish desires to my soul, those hours will remain for ever dearest to me. The Devil was my most valuable teacher.⁶

(La început mi-a fost teamă de tovărăşia lui. Trupul meu era cutremurat de fiori şi eu îmi apăsam palmele deasupra ochilor. În curând, însă, Diavolul îmi ajunse cel mai nelipsit prieten. El venea de câte ori singurătatea mă chinua şi se făcea nevăzut la cel mai mic semn al meu. Ceasurile petrecute împreună, ceasurile în care dăruia minţii mele gânduri alese şi sufletului meu dorinţi neînţelese, ciudate, nebuneşti, îmi vor rămâne întotdeauna cele mai scumpe. Diavolul mi-a fost cel mai de preţ învăţător.)

Apart from projecting a paternal image, the Devil stimulates **spiritual creativity**. The king from Eliade's story makes a clear distinction between 'his Devil' (who tempts the mind) and the others' devil (who tempts the flesh): 'You, people! Do understand that your devil is not my Devil !... Your devil... is the devil of the flesh. That's why I tell you: don't be afraid of the real Devil...' ('Oameni! înţelegeţi că diavolul vostru nu e Diavolul meu !... Diavolul vostru... e diavolul cărnii. De aceea vă strig: nu vă temeţi de adevăratul Diavol...')⁷.

In order to make evident the role Eliade ascribes to the Devil, we have to take into account his youth philosophy, where 'the dangers of the spirit', the symbolic death and madness, played an essential part. In Eliade's vision, Man's soul suffers a process of continuous splitting in the battle between two essential currents of the spiritual life: **the Dionysian** (as a synthesis of Pan and Apollo) and **the Christic**:

⁶Mircea Eliade, 'Eu, Sfântul Diavol şi cele şaisprezece păpuşi', Maddalena (Bucharest, Ed. 'Jurnalul literar', 1996), pp.131-32.

⁷ibid., p.136.

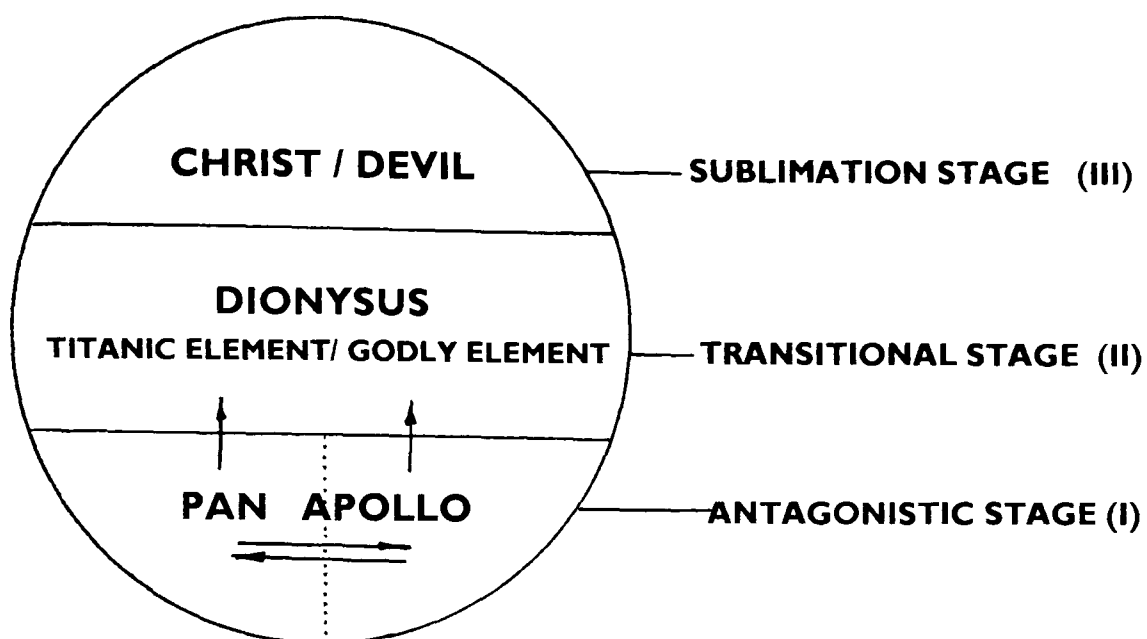
What I understand by personality is but a supreme synthesis, imperiously demanded by the spiritual dynamics, through which Pan and Christ are enthroned in their rights. It is a re-elaboration of values given to life, pleasure, Cosmos, Godliness.⁸

(Ceea ce numesc eu propriu-zis personalitate nu e decât o supremă sinteză necesar cerută de dinamica spirituală, prin care Pan și Christos sunt înscăunați în stăpânirile lor. E o reelaborare de valori date vieții, plăcerii, Cosmosului, Dumnezeirii.)

A series of experiences tempts Man in his path towards the realization of the Self. In Eliade's view, Man is close to God by sublimating his sexual impulses but, at the same time, he has to resist the charms of the 'white Devil' within, Dionysus, who tempts with the pleasures of the mind. In this acceptance Eliade writes about the will's strain in which *Evil* does not disappear through the realisation of *Good*, but grows with it, while seducing and endangering it. Following this vision, the *tragedy* of the situation results from the duality in which 'the soul does not defend itself against the flesh, but against the soul born of flesh' ('sufletul nu se apără numai împotriva trupului, ci și a sufletului născut din trup').⁹ Inscribed in the context of Eliade's early philosophy, his story 'I, the Holy Devil and the Sixteen Puppets' reveals its complex construction, moulded upon its author's beliefs. We could assert that independently of Jung and probably before him, Eliade had the intuition of a quadri-fold structure of the psyché. The schema we made shows Eliade's division of the psyché, as it could be understood from his writings:

⁸Eliade, 'The Male Tragism', Maddalena, p.27.

⁹ibid., p.28.



Eliade alluded to three stages in the formation of the personality, which we call: **1) the antagonistic stage**, where the opposite forces of the Pan- and Apollo-principles are in a continuous fight; **2) the transitional stage**, in which the principle of Dionysus shows a precarious integration (the temporary ‘madness’ of the god Dionysus) between the primary principles (Pan, Apollo); and a striving towards the **3) sublimation stage** of the personality, according to the Christ-principle or the Satan-principle, the principle depending on the result of the previous stages. A fragment from the narrative ‘I, the Holy Devil and the Sixteen Puppets’ in which the hero attempts to express his condition, reflects the structure of our scheme:

I am a man, similar to you, people. But I was born from the Devil... A man could be born two or three times. For the first time he is born out of sin, in order to sin. Flesh blossoms in the man of flesh and he measures everything with flesh.
 The second time, man is born of spirit and for spirit. He travels all over the skies, without raising his body...
 The third birth of man is from the Devil and for the Devil... the man, if he wants - and if the Devil wants too - can ~~choose~~ and create His own world.¹⁰

¹⁰ Eliade, ‘Eu, Sfântul Diavol...’, Maddalena ,pp.137-38.

(Eu sunt om asemenea vouă, oamenilor. Dar născătorul meu a fost Diavolul... Un om se poate naște de două sau de trei ori. Pentru întâia oară se naște din păcat, pentru păcat. Carnea înflorește în omul cărnii și el toate le măsoară cu carne.

A doua oară, se naște omul din duh și pentru duh. Cutreieră în văzduhuri fără să-și înalțe trupul... .

A treia naștere a omului e de la Diavol și pentru Diavol. ... omul, dacă vrea - și dacă vrea și Diavolul - poate să-și aleagă și să-și făurească El lumea.)

The Devil is endowed with as great powers as God, and Eliade insists on the **'saintly' character** of the former, as both have the same 'philosophy' (the play) and they are both creators. In this short story, the Devil is described as having the hands of a 'saintly virgin', while his words are like 'a source of celestial songs' and he is 'white, a saint, and a monk', preaching the renunciation to the world. Even the language employed by Eliade to describe Satan has cadences reminding one of the Biblical style.¹¹ In the novel Isabel and the Devil's Waters, the same motif of the Devil's sanctity is highlighted by the hero nicknamed 'The Doctor': 'My effort to catch the ^{white} devil's creation under its sacred aspect, that is real and eternal - was so frightfully misunderstood... ('Efortul meu de a surprinde creația diavolului alb sub aspectul ei sfânt, adică real și etern - a fost atât de cumplit neînțeles...')¹².

The Romantic vision of the Devil as stimulating creativity is easily recognizable in these writings. The idea of a **Faustian pact with the 'malefic' forces** is evident in both the story and the novel we have spoken about. In his analysis (see the studies The Myth of Reintegration and The Two and the One) of the Mephistopheles-God relationship from Goethe's Faust, the historian of religions stressed the **Devil's quality of bringing out the creative forces of man**. This aspect

¹¹ibid., p.131 (e.g. 'And blessed is the one who hears').

¹²Mircea Eliade, Isabel și apele diavolului (Craiova, Ed. Scrisul Românesc, 1990), p.34.

was constantly explored by Eliade in his fiction.¹³ Since Romanticism, the most important currents to make use of this idea were Freudian psychoanalysis and Jung's analytical psychology. The story of Tartini, the composer and violinist (1692-1770), quoted by Freud in his Interpretation of Dreams is well known¹⁴. As far as Jung's theories are concerned, we will tackle them later.

Eliade's novel, Isabel and the Devil's Waters, makes the difference between the two types of Devil evident: 1) the '**white Devil**' who inspires, provokes the upsurge of the original ideas and 2) the '**black Devil**' who represents the evil principle. The ^{principal} hero, 'the Doctor' suffers a deep psychological crisis when a man looking like a devil approaches him:

No, it wasn't a hallucination. It was a man that looked like a devil. *And he wasn't like my Devil*, the real Devil, the Devil challenging and fighting God. I don't know what happened in my blood when the man that seemed a devil approached me, touched my body, took my hand and whispered: 'invoked I was and here I am'. I remember that an immense disgust... seized me.¹⁵

(Nu, nu era nălucire. Era un om ce părea diavol. *Și nu era asemenea diavolului meu*, diavolului adevărat, diavolului vrăjmășind și luptând cu Dumnezeu. Nu știu ce s-a petrecut în sângele meu când omul ce părea diavol s-a apropiat, mi-a atins trupul, mi-a apucat mâna și mi-a șoptit: 'chemat am fost și am venit'. Mi-amintesc că un desgust nespus... m-a cuprins.)

¹³ 'I would smile and I would be frightened by my blood which flows down towards you, drop by drop. But I am not afraid. I have a lot of blood and the Devil is my friend. Float down, sheet written with blood, into the midst of the people'.

Mircea Eliade, 'I, the Holy Devil and the Sixteen Puppets', Maddalena, p.137.

¹⁴ Tartini... is said to have dreamt that he sold his soul to the Devil, who thereupon seized a violin and played a sonata of exquisite beauty upon it with consummate skill. When the composer awoke, he at once wrote down what he could recollect of it, and the result was his famous "Trillo del Diavolo"'. Sigmund Freud, Op. cit. (London, Penguin Books, 1991), p.774 (footnote 1).

¹⁵ Eliade, Isabel..., p.36.

The distinction between the Devil-principle incarnated in certain people and the inner-demon of the creative spirit which resides in artistic personalities is evident. The Devil could be not only a friend, but a challenger as well, who initiates his chosen ones in higher truths of transcendental value. And because the closeness to the sacred is dangerous for 'normal', profane people, he has to select his 'pupils' carefully. This role of initiator in the mysteries of life is ascribed to the Devil in Eliade's novella 'Miss Christina'. The vampire Christina makes Egor (the main male character) experience the 'reality' of the Devil inside himself:

Egor started to feel something, unseen and unknown around him... He felt as if he was watched by *somebody else*, whose terror he did not experience before. His fright appeared to him in a different way; as if he suddenly woke up in a foreign body, disgusted by the flesh and the blood and the cold sweat which he felt, and which was no longer *his*. The pressure of this foreign body was unbearable. It strangled him, it absorbed his air, exhausting him.¹⁶

(Se simțea privit de *altcineva*, a cărui groază nu o mai încercase. Frica i se lămurea acum cu totul altfel; ca și cum s-ar fi trezit deodată într-un trup strein, dezgustat și de carnea, și de sângele, și de sudoarea rece pe care o simțea și care nu mai era totuși a *lui*. Apăsarea acestui trup strein era peste puțină de suferit. Il gâtuia, îi absorbea aerul, istovindu-l.)

The same initiatory function has the Devil/serpent in the story 'The Snake'. In this writing the Devil assumes the identity of a young aviator called Andronic. He joins a group of travellers, who - like a sort of modern pilgrims - wanted to spend some free time in a monastery. The Devil/serpent 'teaches' them essential existential truths that could be summarised in the tripartite biblical drama of the first man: Eros - Chronos - Thanatos.

Another Devil-figure with initiatic powers is Ahashverus or the Wandering Jew, from Eliade's novella 'Dayan'. In Gilbert Durand's view,

¹⁶Mircea Eliade, Domnișoara Christina - Proză Fantastică vol. I (Bucharest, Ed. Fundației Culturale Române, 1991), p.82.

the image of Ahasverus is part of 'the Romantic epos of the synthesis and mythical rehabilitation of evil'¹⁷. In Mircea Eliade's story, the physicist Dayan finds the ultimate equation - for which he searched all his life - only with the help of Ahashverus, who takes him for a revealing journey in Time and Space.

If in some writings of Eliade, the Devil appears as initiator *par excellence*, in others what is emphasized is his status as brother/friend in relation to Divinity or certain mortals endowed with exceptional qualities. In scientific books like The Myth of Reintegration or Patterns in Comparative Religion, the author dwells on themes of **brotherhood** and **convertibility** between God and the Devil. Eliade grouped the myths dealing with this aspect under the name of **myths of polarity** (or **by-unity**) and **reintegration**:

There is a major group of mythological traditions about the 'brotherhood' of gods and demons..., the 'friendship' or consanguinity between heroes and their opponents... . There is another category of myths and legends illustrating not merely a brotherhood between opposing figures, but their paradoxical convertibility.¹⁸

It is this very same idea that sustains the structure of a novel of Eliade's youth, The Light Dying Away. The book is the Faustian story of a librarian and researcher who, following a fire, suffers a shock that changes his personality. The Jungian theory of the Shadow and the Self, applied to the novel, sheds light on **the relationship** between this character and Manoil (an alter ego of the Devil),^a relationship on which the whole book is constructed. The librarian (Cesare) is a 'rational' being, living only for his manuscripts. He has repressed his unconscious

¹⁷Gilbert Durand, Structurile Antropologice ale Imaginarului - Introducere în arhetipologia generală (Bucharest, Ed. Univers, 1977), p.363.

¹⁸Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion (London, Sheed and Ward, 1987), p.417.

urges so much that he is prone to a personality breakdown. (In his studies, Jung examined the condition of the modern man who 'does not understand how much his "rationalism" (which has destroyed his capacity to respond to numinous symbols and ideas) has put him at the mercy of the psychic "underworld" '19). Asexual, unable to express any feelings, Cesare has led a life devoted to study. But the sudden blaze experienced in the library releases the powers of his unconscious, making evident his own Shadow (=Manoil) to him. Manoil, like Cesare, is frighteningly intelligent and incarnates the evil principle. He tempts Cesare with the powers of the mind. There follows in the novel what in Jungian terms is called a 'battle for deliverance', which reedits the struggle of primitive man to achieve consciousness, a conflict expressed (according to Joseph L. Henderson) by the contest between the archetypal hero and the cosmic powers of evil.²⁰ As a consequence of the fire Cesare is threatened with blindness. His gradual loss of sight increases his 'inward' vision and the subsequent struggle between him and Manoil is in fact, the fight between his ego and the Shadow. The plot preserves reminiscences of Faust, whose hero, failing to live to the full an important part of his early life, was an incomplete, unreal person 'who lost himself in a fruitless quest for metaphysical goals that failed to materialize'²¹. Mephistopheles is the repressed part of Faust's ego, and in the same way Manoil is the Shadow of Cesare's ego. The two are inter-linked. Meditating on his relationship with Cesare, Manoil makes his power evident: 'We two are linked, because to one of us the promise was made and he refused, while the other of us conquered what was

¹⁹Carl Gustav Jung, 'Approaching the Unconscious', Man and His Symbols, ed. by Carl Gustav Jung (London, Picador, 1978), p.84.

²⁰Joseph L. Henderson, 'Ancient Myths and Modern Man' in Man..., pp.110-11.

²¹ibid., p.112.

promised to the first.' ('Noi doi suntem legați, căci unuia i s-a făgăduit și a refuzat, iar celălalt a cucerit făgăduința.')²² The last scene of the book is a final confrontation between Manoil and the blind Cesare, on a seashore. Manoil after threatening and beating Cesare, kills himself in an ultimate gesture of revolt, leaving Cesare alone in his endless night. In that very moment when the hands of the librarian discover the dead body of Manoil, he understands that, indirectly, he himself killed 'his brother'. On a psychological level, this is the drama of the intellect destroying the senses. The monologue of Cesare on the beach is symbolic:

Manoil is there, motionless, warm. ... he calls him, he embraces him, Abel, his brother. ... He understands, now he understands everything. From now on he is alone, deserted. He knows that without Manoil the nothingness *undermines* him. Bridges linked him to Manoil, and *Manoil* is dead. All meanings come through him. Without Manoil, he is nothing, is nothing.²³

(Manoil e acolo, nemișcat, cald. ... îl strigă, îl îmbrățișează, Abel, fratele lui. ... Înțelege, acum înțelege tot. E singur de acum, pustiu. Știe că fără el nimicnicia îl surpă, fără Manoil. Poduri îl legau de el, și e mort. Toate înțelesurile vin prin el. Fără el e nimic, e nimic.)

Cesare is the man who kills his Shadow, realizing that in fact, he destroys himself, as it is impossible to live without a Shadow.

The **motif of the double**, treated in many Eliadean literary writings, appears under a sublimated form in the novel The Forbidden Forest, in the interchangeable destinies of two men who resemble each other physically: Ciru Partenie and Ștefan Viziru. The tragic death of the first one (mistakenly shot by a State Security agent) acquires a special significance: it is equivalent to ^{the} symbolic death of Ștefan Viziru, his alter ego. The latter experiences a feeling of culpability, as it was he who was

²²Mircea Eliade, Lumina ce se stinge, vol. II (Bucharest, Ed. 'Odeon', 1991), p.75.

²³ibid., p.115.

the person wanted by the murderer of Ciru Partenie: 'He was shot because of me', continued Ștefan. 'He confused Partenie with me. In a sense, I am the one who killed him.' ('Din cauza mea l-a împușcat, continuă Ștefan. L-a confundat cu mine. Intr-un anumit sens, eu l-am omorât.')24.

Apart from the two main images of Devil as **1) initiator** and **2) brother/friend**, the motif of **3) the fight with the Devil** occupies a central part in Eliade's fiction. The **fight with the Devil** takes two aspects that could be translated as 1) the struggle of the ego to integrate the shadow by avoiding a disintegration of personality and 2) the fight between two principles in a 'disguised' re-construction of the primordial battle amid Light and Dark, the Created and the Uncreated, Time and No-Time. The first type of the ego-personality's struggle to integrate the Shadow is, according to Carl Gustav Jung, a 'moral problem':

...for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance.²⁵

This moral effort is sometimes translated into a temporary disintegration of personality that could lead to an initiatory 'madness'. Synthesizing the symbolism of the Shadows, Mircea Eliade highlighted their equivalence with Wisdom, as for example, the future shamans must undergo a stage of madness, considered a preliminary phase of their spiritual growth ('creativity is always in relation to a certain "madness" or "orgy", unifying the symbolism of Death and Shadows.')26.

²⁴Mircea Eliade, Noaptea de Sânziene, vol. I (Bucharest, Ed. Minerva, 1991), p.237.

²⁵Carl Gustav Jung, Aspects of the Feminine (London, Ark Paperbacks, 1992), p.165.

²⁶Eliade, Symbolism..., p.11.

In Eliade's novels the exceptional characters only suffer from a schizoid split of personality, understood as yet another trial in their strive for perfection. In The Return from Paradise, the hero Pavel Anicet experiences a double life (he loves two women at a time) that leads to the dissolution of his personality, preceded by the typical psychological symptoms like *thought insertion*²⁷ and *external control*: 'And strangely, I am not bothered at all by the mediocrity of my conversation. As if it doesn't belong to me, as if somebody else replies in my place.' ('Și e ciudat, nu mă supără deloc mediocritatea convorbirii mele. Ca și cum nu mi-ar aparține mie; ca și cum ar răspunde altul pentru mine.')²⁸. Unable to recover his lost unity, Pavel Anicet commits suicide.

Another character suffering from *thoughts insertion* is 'the Doctor', from the novel Isabel and the Devil's Waters. His personality fights a powerful complex whose nucleus is formed by his Shadow. His triumph over the shadow does not mean victory, though, but the destruction of all his creative urges, in favour of a material, mediocre life. (Instead of pursuing his studies and fulfilling his ideals, out of guilt, he decides to marry Isabel and dedicate his life to her child as if it were his own progeny.). 'The Doctor' has the lucidity to acknowledge his failure: '... by renouncing the Devil - I gave up everything that was left great and elevating in my soul.' ('... renunțând la diavol - am renunțat la tot ceea ce mai rămăsese mare și înalt în suflul(sic) meu.')²⁹. The Shadow represents in this novel the source of the creative impulses and destructive urges, as Jung described it, reminding one of the fact that in

²⁷'... thoughts are inserted into one's mind from outside and are under external influence'. Richard D. Gross, Psychology - The Science of Mind and Behaviour (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), p.946.

²⁸Mircea Eliade, Intoarcerea din Rai (Bucharest, Ed. Cugetarea-Georgescu Delafras, 1943), p.77.

²⁹Eliade, Isabel..., p.35.

a highly creative person the Shadow may overwhelm the ego and cause temporary insanity³⁰.

For the second category of **the battle between Light and Dark, Created and Un-Created, Time and No-Time**, Eliade's novel The Light Dying Away is exemplary. The confrontation Manoil-Cesare on the seashore, at dawn, is moulded on the paradigmatic fight between two giant brothers representing opposing principles. The victory of Cesare over Manoil symbolizes the emergence of Life out of Waters, of Light out of Shadows and 'the creation of the Universe as well as the beginning of History'³¹.

Analysing the Devil's image in Eliade's books we could say that he was one of the pioneers in 'rehabilitating' this archetype in the religious domain³² (e.g. by studying the many beliefs in the consanguinity God-Devil) and explored its complex symbolism in his literary writings. The effects he obtained in his fiction, by making use of the Devil's symbolism, are not only striking, but beneficial for the reader in search of his/her own Self. Starting with a teenage fascination for the Romantic theme of the pact with the Devil (his first published major story, 'How I discovered the Philosophers' Stone' exploits this motif), Eliade reached through the religions' path, what Jung succeeded by his analytico-psychological path: to re-establish the major status of the position held by the Devil/Shadow.

³⁰Gross, Psychology..., p.924.

³¹Eliade, Symbolism..., p.7.

³²The Romantic current rehabilitated it in literary writings.

THE MAGICIAN

In his academic writings Eliade studied in depth the condition of the Alchemist or the Shaman, revealing a long-cherished³³ nostalgia for the process of understanding the structure of a superior being. His fiction is also enriched with a multitude of characters like yogis, doctors/charlatans, lithomants, mythical guides with archetypal powers, etc., all of which we grouped under the generic symbol of the **Magician**. The magic itself could be broadly divided into three types: 1) **occult powers**; 2) **'scientific' miracles** and what I named 3) **mythical magic**. In the first category, the **occult powers**, three early writings of Eliade could be included, as they use Yogic/Tantric themes: 'Nights at Serampore', 'The Secret of Dr Honigberger' and The Light Dying Away. In the novel, magic is used as a pretext in order to organise the plot. The Magician/Devil figure is Manoil who performs a Tantric rite of black magic (together with a professor of Slavonic Languages and a frigid secretary, Melania), whose consequences is the setting on fire of the library where the action takes place. In his confession, Manoil explains his desire to acquire a Godlike condition by accomplishing a Tantric rite; 'A rite, that's what it was. A rite through which is worshipped, is "fixed" the most uncertain function of the species: sex. The abolition of voluptuousness, that's what I tried and verified'. ('Un rit, aceasta a fost. Un rit prin care se divinizează, se "fixează" funcțiunea cea mai incertă a speței, sexul. Anularea voluptății, aceasta am încercat și verificat eu.')³⁴.

³³Eliade's first important short story, 'How I discovered the Philosophers' Stone', has an alchemist as a central figure.

³⁴Eliade, Lumina..., vol. II, (1991), p.72.

The reader familiarised with Eliade's scientific writings on Yoga can easily detect in this novel the description of the Tantric rite called *maithuna*. Through it, Manoil attempts to become like Buddha: omniscient and master over magic forces.³⁵

If in this novel the magic is just a pretext, in the short story 'Nights at Serampore' it forms the very foundation of the plot. Suren Bose, the yogi-magician, plays with time and space, inducing by his rituals the dislocation of past towards present or the insertion of present into the past. One of the heroes in the group who was projected in time to witness a crime that happened one hundred and fifty years earlier, tried to solve the mystery of the happening:

... either Suren Bose *was feeling* our approach and, in order to make us leave the place of his terrifying ceremonial, he bewitched us; or just through the simple accomplishment of his secret ritual, some forces were unleashed that projected us... into another space and time...³⁶

(... fie că Suren Bose *simțea* apropierea noastră, și atunci, pentru a ne îndepărta de locul terifiantului său ceremonial ne-a vrăjit, fie că prin simpla împlinire a acestui ritual secret s-au dezlănțuit forțe care ne-au proiectat... într-un alt spațiu și timp...)

The underlying idea of this short-story resides in the well known philosophical concept of *māyā*: everything is illusion. William Coates already remarked³⁷ ^{upon} the recurrent character of this theme in several writings of Eliade and consequently we do not dwell on it. The short story 'The Secret of Dr Honigberger' projects - in the first plane - the supernatural powers that could be obtained by Yogic techniques.

³⁵Mircea Eliade, *Yoga - Nemurire și libertate* (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1993), p.225.

³⁶Mircea Eliade, 'Noptile la Serampore', *Secretul Doctorului Honigberger - Proza Fantastica*, vol. II (Bucharest, Ed. Fundatiei Culturale Romane, 1991), p.89.

³⁷William Coates, 'Littérature fantastique, métaphysique et occulte' in *L'Herne*, Paris (1978), pp. 325-37.

Ultimately, Dr Zerlendi - the main character - disappears in Shambala, the miraculous country, reached only by those initiated in Yoga.

In the second category of magic, the 'scientific miracle' ^{there are} ~~two~~ ^{that} novellas ^{could} be placed : 'Youth without Youth' and 'Les trois grâces'. The first one is the story of an old teacher who - hit by lightning - instead of dying is rejuvenated and acquires supernatural powers. This condition is otherwise examined by Eliade in his religious studies:

The man hit by lightning, without ^{negative} ~~p~~ consequences, acquires a 'sensitivity' inaccessible to the profane experience's level; the revelation of the divine 'choice' manifests itself through the destruction of all previous structures: 'The chosen one' becomes 'another one': he feels not only 'dead and resurrected', but revived for *another type* of existence which... is based on different existential dimensions.³⁸

Dominic Matei, the hero from the novella 'Youth without Youth', performs miracles like, for example, making things appear or happen just by thinking of them. The episode with the roses he thinks of and materialise in seconds is exemplary in this sense. Also based on the so-called 'scientific miracle' is the story 'Les trois grâces'. The same theme of rejuvenation is present in the plot. 'Les trois grâces' is about three women who, undergoing a cancer treatment, are restored to youth. But because of the treatment's interruption they suffer a Persephone's fate: for half an year they are young, while the other half they are back to their normal biological condition. The 'magician'-figure is represented here by a medic called Tătaru, the one who discovered the miraculous vaccination. At the root of his research were certain allusions from the Old Testament (e.g. after the original sin the human body lost the secret of periodic regeneration).

³⁸Mircea Eliade, Mituri, vise și mistere în Eseuri (Bucharest, Ed. Științifică, 1991), p.185.

The **mythical magic**, the third type of magic in Eliade's oeuvre, occupies the central role in many of his writings, being by far the best represented category. Andronic, the main hero in the novella 'The Snake' performs magic rituals with a serpent. Another character of the story, captain Manuilă, the profane man *par excellence*, is caught under Andronic's spell, like all the others witnessing the scene:

Andronic murmured something, ... Strange syllables could be heard. As if he didn't speak Romanian. Words with many, long drawling vowels. However Andronic was saying something, because he heard the word *șarpa* many times. Probably, some spell..³⁹

(Andronic murmură ceva, ... se auzeau silabe stranii. Parcă nu vorbea românește. Cuvinte cu vocale multe, lungi, târăgănite. Și totuși, spunea ceva Andronic; căci de mai multe ori auzi cuvântul *șarpa*. Vreo vrajă... .)

Andronic is the mythical king of Serpents, a magician who charms the young girl Dorina into his world of primordial beauty. Another magician image appears under the guise of a lithomant in the story 'Stone Diviner'. In this work of literature, ideas based on Eliade's scholarly books, like the 'worship of stones', can be detected:

... in the so-called 'worship of stones' not all stones are held to be sacred. We shall always find that some stones are venerated because they are a certain shape, or because they are very large, or because they are bound up with some ritual.⁴⁰

Beldiman, the lithomant, chooses carefully his stones, according to their shape, colour or position, and he symbolises the archaic stone-worshipper who considered stones as powerful hierophanies. For

³⁹Eliade, 'Șarpele', *Domnișoara...*, vol. I, p.195.

⁴⁰Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.13.

Beldiman, stones foretell the future, so they reveal 'something outside their normal status as things'⁴¹.

The Wandering Jew from the novella 'Dayan' is another character who performs miracles: he makes Dayan see with the eye he usually could not see with, he transcends different times and spaces, walks through walls and knows all the mysteries of the Universe, apart from his own fate. *Anima mundi*, he is a benefic guide who helps Dayan to walk the path towards the own Self, container of all truths. Even if in the profane realm his magic indirectly triggers Dayan's death, in the sacred one, Ahashverus' initiation means not only salvation, but eternal Knowledge.

In the contemporary world, magic is rejected as charlatanry. This idea leads to the concept of **unrecognizability of the sacred**, that Eliade used in his religious writings and is present in his narrative^{work} as well. In the story 'A Fourteen-year-old Photo', one of the protagonists, Doctor Martin/Dugay (he has a double identity) performs miracles like Christ. He asserts that nobody will recognize the real God when He will decide to appear again among people, in the street or in a pub. Another figure at the boundary between magic and imposture is Doftorul in the novella 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'. Of all the literary figures created by Eliade, he best resembles the shaman. His name in Romanian is a word whose meaning is between 'doctor' and 'wizard' ('doftor' = 'doctor'; 'vraci'). In one of his scholarly books (Shamanism - Archaic techniques of ecstasy) Eliade describes the shaman as a magician and a medicine man: 'he is believed to cure, like all doctors, and to perform miracles of the fakir type, like all magicians... . But beyond this, he is a psychopomp,...'⁴². Recounting the miracles performed by the Doftor, the

⁴¹ibid., p.13.

⁴²Eliade, Op. cit., p.4.

teacher Fărâmbă from the story 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats' remembers the aquarium in which the magician used to walk smoking, without dumping his clothes. (This is clearly an allusion to the sacredness of the primordial waters homologated to the amniotic liquid. Doftorul is in fact performing a degraded shamanic ritual consisting in a regression into the Great Mother's uterus.) The 'sorcery' with the coffer into which a lot of people entered and which was afterwards shrunk by the Doftor until it disappeared, is part of the same scenario of initiation. Doftorul in reality wants to teach people - in an original way - the old beliefs, like for example, the possibility of communication with different worlds.

Taking into consideration all the literary works employing the symbol of the Magician, it can be said that Eliade preferred the positive side of it: its initiatory function into the mysteries of the *Cosmos* and Life.

WITCH - VAMPIRE-WOMAN

Eliade's female characters in his fiction are in their majority archetypes. Their types could be extreme: **virginal** like the nuns (e.g. Irina from The Forbidden Forest, Madonna Intelligenza from 'Dayan'), **licentious** like the prostitutes (e. g. Christina from 'Miss Christina', Nora from The Hooligans). Also they could oscillate between extremes like, for example, Irina from The Hooligans who suffered of periodic crisis of fervent Catholicism and libertine behaviour. But the most frequent archetype that could be related to Eliade's female characters is the **Witch**. The heroines could be classified into three types: **1) the ambivalent woman** (witch/fairy) who reveals mysteries and initiates; **2) the tempting woman** who is an obstacle *par excellence* and **3) the malefic woman** who 'destroys' through her passion.

The **ambivalent woman** - witch or fairy, she-devil or goddess - has a main characteristic: inaccessibility. She slips through fingers and cannot be possessed except by those who are predestined to do so and consequently are endowed with exceptional qualities (e.g. strength of character, ability to perceive the sacred, etc.). The reasons for their 'inaccessibility' are various: Maitreyi (from the novel with the same name) is from a **Brahmin caste** which does not allow certain links with 'outsiders'; Oana ('The Old Man and the Bureaucrats') has a **giant, goddess-like stature** and no normal man can match her; the young women from the story 'With the Gypsy Girls' have the '**bad reputation**' of 'prostitutes' attached to them; Marina ('The Old Man and the Bureaucrats') is '**too old**' for her lover Darvari; Niculina (Nineteen Roses) is already **engaged** to another man and Ileana (The Forbidden Forest) **disappears** all the time, travelling in and out of the

path of the hero, Ștefan. Fairies or witches, they are all fascinatingly beautiful and give the impression that they came into this world from another realm. They also seem to perform some kind of sorcery. Oana from 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats' practices ritual nudity and casts spells over a magic plant ('Deadly Nightshade'), calling its spirit to help her find a male counterpart. (In his study of witchcraft, Eliade showed the symbolic meaning of ritual nudity as not only a powerful magico-religious force, but an expression of the nostalgia for a beatific human existence.)⁴³ The three young women in 'With the Gypsy Girls' dance on the huge bronze drums, play amongst folding screen and mirrors, disguise themselves and make riddles for the enchanted piano teacher, Gavrilăscu. They resemble the fairies who adore to sing and dance, but who can become dangerous and cruel, maddening those around them. Marina from 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats' (similar to Niculina in Nineteen Roses) possesses a 'special technique' by which she changes her ages like her clothes and knows secrets about the other realm. Both heroines, Marina and Niculina love the theatre and this is a 'degraded' way of performing archaic rites and communicating transcendent ideas through them. Maitreyi, in Eliade's early novel, is a teenage Hindu girl, in love with a tree. She bewitches Allan, the engineer, with an incantatory ceremony of a ritual 'engagement':

I swear upon you, Earth, that I will belong to Allan and to nobody else. I will grow from him as the grass grows from you. And the way you wait for the rain, I will wait for his arrival, and how the sun-rays are for you, the same his body will be for me. ... Let our embrace be like the first day of the *monsoon*. Rain be our kiss.⁴⁴

⁴³Mircea Eliade, 'Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions - Essays in Comparative Religions' (Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.90.

⁴⁴Mircea Eliade, Maitreyi in Maitreyi. Nuntă în Cer (Bucharest, Ed. Minerva, 1986), pp.106-107.

(Mă leg pe tine, pământule, că eu voi fi a lui Allan, și a nimeni altuia. Voi crește din el ca iarba din tine. Și cum aștepti tu ploaia, așa îți voi aștepta eu venirea, și cum îți sunt ție razele, așa va fi trupul său mie. ... Să fie îmbrățișarea noastră ca cea dintâi zi a *monsoon*-ului. Ploaie să fie sărutul nostru.)

Allan is afraid even to touch her, so 'forbidden' and charmed she seemed to him. But the most mysterious of them all is Ileana, from The Forbidden Forest. She is a typical fairy (she has the name of the most popular fairy in Romanian folklore, Ileana Cosânzeana) who appears in a forest, during St John's Night. As soon as the main character Ștefan, sees her, he becomes possessed and cannot regain his tranquillity except by meeting her again and again. Their paths cross many times, but the always young Ileana disappears because of Ștefan's inconstancy and mistakes. After twelve years of searching for her and for his Self, the hero realises that in fact his destiny is irretrievably linked to hers. They die in a car accident, facing together the most important existential trial: their own death. The ambivalent character of Ileana as angel of death and fairy, is highlighted in the final scene of the book.

All these **ambiguous, ambivalent women** reveal mythical and transcendental mysteries like: predestination in love, the cycle of reincarnation, the secret of death, immortality and freedom (understood as exit from preconditioned space and time). They are modern, 'sublimated' witches that, at the same time charm and initiate their elected ones into a superior condition.

A character that could be framed in the second category, the **tempting woman** - a Circe-like **obstacle** - is Mrs Zissu from The Forbidden Forest. She attempts to impede the real journey of Ștefan towards Ileana and himself. Mrs Zissu's passion is devouring. It subdues and confines Ștefan to the law of the flesh. While Ileana represents the spiritual level, Mrs Zissu stands for carnal temptation, a trial for Ștefan's

senses and a psychological step that has to be surpassed in his way towards accomplishment of the Self:

... maybe he would have still remained for a long time caught in Circe's spell, Stella Zissu's spell, because he was without doubt bewitched, he couldn't separate from her..., he was unable to break away from her charm, following her everywhere, waiting with fear to see her getting close to him with her half-open and very red mouth, with her white teeth, shining threateningly...⁴⁵

(... poate că ar fi rămas încă multă vreme prins în vraja Circei, a Stellei Zissu, căci fără îndoială fusese fermecat, nu se mai putea despărți de ea, ... incapabil să se smulgă din vraja ei, urmărind-o pretutindeni, așteptând, cu teamă, s-o vadă, apropiindu-se de el cu gura întredeschisă și foarte roșie, cu dinții albi, strălucind amenințatori...).

The third category, that of the **malefic woman** who destroys her partner through her passion, is best represented by Una, the heroine from The Return from Paradise. Pavel Anicet, her lover, renounces his spiritual life in favour of erotic pleasures. Not being able to cope with the continuous tension between his inner structure and the pressures of a possessive liaison, he kills himself. The name he gave to his lover, 'Una' (in Romanian means 'One') has a connection with the 'green Orphic girl', praised by a poet (Dan Botta), and the Etruscan Goddess Uni, equivalent of Venus, the goddess of Love. Alluding to her destructive frenzy of desire for Pavel Anicet, his friends mockingly recite to him Botta's verses: 'Oh, she endlessly calls me / The pale, the mad one / The Green Girl Una, / And her stone of blood / Starts stirring me. ('Oh, mă cheamă-ntruna / Palida, nebuna, / Fata Verde Una, / Și-n mine se strânge / Piatra ei de sânge...')⁴⁶. Love becomes for Pavel a path to disintegration, an 'anaesthetic' for the critical spirit, intellectual pride and artistic sensitivity. He feels like a prisoner⁴⁷ and the role played by

⁴⁵Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. II (1991), pp.394-95.

⁴⁶Mircea Eliade, Intoarcerea din Rai (Bucharest, Ed. Rum-Irina, 1992), p.150.

⁴⁷'And what a terrifying thing to be sure of this, to know that it doesn't matter what happens, somebody will continue to love ^{you}.' *ibid.*, p.57.

Una is reminiscent of a malefic *anima*. Their relationship could be inscribed in the typical series of demonic eroticism described by Northrop Frye:

The demonic eroticism becomes a powerful passion, destructive, which plots against loyalty and frustrates the one who experiences it, being generally symbolised by a prostitute, a witch, a mermaid or any other tempting woman, a physical object of passion...⁴⁸

The same situation is experienced by Alexandru, from the novel The Hooligans. If in The Return from Paradise the man suffers the consequences of a devastating relationship, in this novel it is the woman who commits suicide, as a result of the doubly destructive character of such a bond. Deciding to leave her, Alexandru tries to liberate himself from a suffocating and damaging love affair that was limiting his aspirations:

But my opinion is that the woman who loves you in absolute way is driven by a demonic force, powerful, obscure, which finishes by crushing you. Such a woman annuls you, decomposes you. She is a far more powerful force than you.⁴⁹

(Părerea mea, însă este că femeia care te iubește absolut e stăpânită de o forță demonică, puternică, obscură, care sfârșește prin a te strivi. O asemenea femeie te anulează, te descompune. Este o forță mult mai tare decât tine.)

Nevertheless the most powerful image of the woman-witch is the **vampire-woman**. From the representations of Hecate (goddess of the darkness and black moon, female demon and nightmare, considered by Hesiod mistress of madness, somnambulism and dreams), to that of Kali Durga (anthropophagous with terrible teeth who drinks blood from

⁴⁸Northrop Frye, Anatomia Criticii (Bucharest, Ed. Univers, 1972), p.185.

⁴⁹Mircea Eliade, Huliganii (Bucharest, Ed. Rum-Irina, 1992), p.38.

skulls), the theme of the woman-danger, negatively valued as representing bloodthirsty femininity, appears in popular beliefs and literary works all over the world and in all times.⁵⁰ Two other typical examples are the Algerian Lalla Imma Tifellūt, a she-demon whose love meant death (she caused twenty-seven young men to disappear) and the Moroccan Ā'isha Qandīsha, a very libidinous she-demon who indulged in seducing young men.⁵¹ It is the very idea of blood and peril that gives to all these woman-images a powerful aura of sensuality and attractiveness. As Gilbert Durand remarked, blood is not only master over life and death, but it is also the first human horologe, the first human sign that could be correlated to the lunar drama.⁵²

The archaic idea⁵³ of the link between a human being and a supernatural one (vampire-woman) constitutes the plot of Eliade's novella 'Miss Christina'. Christina is a vampire-woman with Botticellian suavity, who falls for the painter Egor. Her transcendent love takes forms of pure carnality. Mistress of the moon (like the mythical vampires), Christina travels between the two realms, in a carriage driven by resurrected horses to haunt Egor's dreams with her fragrance of violets. Her behaviour towards Egor is a mixture of ingenuity and shyness, while people's stories about her, when alive, describe a girl with a libertine conduct. In the times of the bloody peasant revolt for land, 1907, Christina allegedly called the ploughmen to distribute them her land, in exchange for her life:

⁵⁰Durand, *Structurile....*, pp.91-92.

⁵¹Julian Baldick, 'The Legend of RābiʿA of Baṣra: Christian Antecedents, Muslim Counterparts', in *Religion* (1990) 20, pp. 233-47.

⁵²Durand, *Structurile....*, p.136.

⁵³S. Comhaire-Sylvain observed over 250 fairy tales and myths from Europe, America and Africa built on this theme. *ibid.*, p.108.

People say that peasants came from other estates and she called them two by two, into her bedroom, to give them parts of her property... In fact she allowed them all to rape her in turns. She herself urged them to do so. She received them naked, two by two. Until the administrator came and killed her.⁵⁴

(Oamenii spun că veniseră țăranii de pe alte moșii și ea i-a chemat câte doi, câte doi, în iatac, să le împartă averea... De fapt se lăsa siluită pe rând de toți. Ea îi îndemna, chiar ea. li primea goală, pe covor doi câte doi. Până a venit vechilul și a împușcat-o.)

The paradoxical behaviour of Christina could be understood in the light of Eliade's studies on occultism and witchcraft: 'Over against a dangerous crisis..., indiscriminate and excessive sexual intercourse plunges the collectivity into the fabulous epoch of the beginning.'⁵⁵ Christina tried to exorcize, through a 'licentious' ritual, the dangerous historical event (the violent peasant revolt) into the beatific stage of the world's beginnings. At the same time, Christina's conduct hints at a superior understanding of the world. Similar to the archaic witches⁵⁶, she hopes to transmute her own condition, by breaking the sexual taboos and partaking in 'demonic' orgies. Although the vampire Christina tries to protect Egor (she did not take any blood from him), he is destroyed by the mere impossibility of their love. She is the typical otherworldly creature that gets sincerely involved in a passionate affair, without realising her own negative powers:

On ne saurait dire que la femme fatale simule toujours une passion qu'elle n'éprouve pas. Il arrive qu'elle aime sincèrement celui qu'elle perd. Par là, elle est elle-même victime du destin dont elle est l'instrument et révèle sa dimension tragique.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Eliade, *Domnișoara...*, vol. I, p.49.

⁵⁵Eliade, *Occultism...*, p.88.

⁵⁶ibid., p.91.

⁵⁷Claude Olivieri et al., *Dictionnaire des types et caractères littéraires* (Paris, Fernand Nathan, 1978), p.74.

Like Circe, the sorceress who sent Ulysses to Hades in order to see his mother Anticleia, Christina guides Egor into the Underworld, where he recognizes his dead friend, Radu Prajan. A vampire's instincts could be detected in the behaviour of Simina as well, the little sadistic girl, a miniature of Christina. She humiliates Egor's senses in a cellar, precisely where Christina's remains are buried.

Another teenage girl, Agripina, from the short story 'The Captain's Daughter', is attracted by the demonic condition of vampire-witch. She 'threatens' her friend, a peasant boy who accompanied her for a walk, describing herself as an ogre:

Are you afraid of my mouth, the mouth of a big and greedy frog, of my long and sharp teeth, of these ugly and restless teeth, ready to attack you, to tear you and break you to pieces, to eat you bit by bit ?⁵⁸

(Ți-e frică de gura mea de broască mare și lacomă, de dinții mei lungi și ascuțiți, de dinții ăștia urâți și neodihniți, gata să se repeadă în tine, să te sfârtece și să te fărâme, să te înghită bucatică cu bucatică ?)

In general, in Mircea Eliade's literary writings, the young woman who inspires fear, is also irresistible for some categories of men. She constitutes a challenge for the male characters with a 'knight-type' personality, always in quest of something to conquer through arduous ordeals and great risks. Such a relationship has, besides its obvious dangers, certain rewards: access - through love - to another realm and another mode of being. It can be said that this is, in fact, a different form of the famous pact with the Devil. The pact is replaced by a consuming love (spiritual or physical), and the devil by a highly attractive woman-witch / fairy / vampire.

The symbolic line starting with the archetypal image of the Devil and provoking a chain reaction (Double - Magician - Witch - Vampire -

⁵⁸Eliade, 'Fata Căpitanului' in Secretul..., vol. II, p.148.

- Woman) was constantly rendered valuable by Eliade in his narrative. The explanation lays in the fact that these images make a direct link with transcendency. And this confers them a special condition: they are somehow the 'bearers' of *certain secrets* of the Universe.

**ACTOR / MASK; JESTER;
THE BLIND PERSON / THE ONE-EYED;
MILITARY MAN / UNIFORM**

ACTOR / MASK

Motto: Entre la création divine et la création artistique, il y a peu de différence, tous les artistes sont des apprentis-sorciers et aussi des alchimistes.

(Cl. Olivieri et al., Dictionnaire des types et caractères littéraires, pp.18-19)

Searching for perfection, 'the artist's desire is too strong for him to be part of this world'¹. In Eliade's fiction the condition of the actor is considered exemplary, for he embodies an atemporal being, the closest 'equivalent' to the archaic man. The actor re-lives with each role the universal religions, for what are plays, if not 'degraded' scenarios of ancient myths and rituals ? In his book Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, Eliade wrote about 'the mythological precedents of the majority of spectacles'; emphasizing the two specific dimensions of a drama: the 'concentrated Time' and the mythological structure². In the context of Eliade's literary writings, the story 'Goodbye !' is structured as a dialogue between a team of actors - as 'initiates' into existential secrets

¹Olivieri et al., Dictionnaire..., p.19.

²Eliade, Mituri..., in Eseuri, p.136.

- and their spectators³. The artists explain their special status, to the audience:

You live in the XXth century, in precisely 1964, and *you cannot go back in Time*. We can, because we are actors, that is we participate at the mystery, we relive in a concentrated way, the whole history of religions.⁴

(Dumneavoastră trăiți în secolul XX, exact în 1964, și *nu vă puteți întoarce înapoi în Timp*. Noi putem, pentru că suntem actori, adică participăm la mister, retrăim condensat întreaga istorie a religiilor.)

All the actors in Eliade's literary works are endowed with two essential features, they are able to 1) exorcize Time and 2) 'create' life. These two characteristics are the very traits of Divinity, but the artists have certain limits. While they possess the powers to exorcize Time and play with History, they themselves are not deathless. Concerning the creativity, they can 'create', but imaginary lives only. (These limits are responsible for the feelings of non-fulfilment and failure that haunt Eliade's characters.) Still the capacity to exit time brings the real freedom, by an escape from the laws of history and through the attainment of absolute knowledge, of a transmundane nature. This is the message that Eliade's heroes try to convey to the 'profane' people, symbolized by spectators:

These things happened a long time ago and, consequently we, the actors, we can play them between us, because we are free to live - that is to act - in any century, in any historical epoch. And for us, these things are highly important but, obviously, we *play*, so we can afford to really believe, to pray, to curse...⁵

³This technique of improvised play through a dialogue between actors and spectators is reminds of the *Commedia dell'Arte* style.

⁴Mircea Eliade, 'Adio!', *In Curte la Dionis* (Bucharest, Ed. Cartea Românească, 1981), p.174. The underlining is mine.

⁵*ibid.*, p.177.

(Astea s-au petrecut demult și, deci, le putem juca noi, actorii, între noi, pentru că noi suntem liberi să trăim - adică să jucăm - în orice secol, în orice epocă istorică. Iar pentru noi, lucrurile acestea sunt extraordinar de importante, dar, evident, noi *jucăm*, deci ne putem permite să credem cu adevărat, să ne rugăm, să blestemăm...).

The same idea is proclaimed by another Eliadean character, the playwright Dan Bibicescu, in the novel The Forbidden Forest. For him a theatrical performance's function is to help actors and spectators alike to go back to the *illud tempus* and live the ecstasy of a no-time dimension: 'The spectacle, gentlemen, the spectacle is the great supra-temporal beatitude which is allowed to us... ('Spectacolul, domnilor mei, spectacolul este marea beatitudine supra-temporală care ne este îngăduită...')⁶.

In his last novel, Nineteen Roses, Eliade connects the idea of 'spectacle' to the one of **freedom**. Real freedom means for Eliade the capacity to refuse the temporal duration in which one is 'programmed' to live, and be able to enter any period of humanity's history. The dramatist Pandele intuits this specific function of the theatre:

... in our days, the spectacle is our only chance to experiment the *absolute freedom*, and this function will be better proved in the near future. I specify, *absolute freedom*, because this has nothing to do with those freedoms of a social, economic or political order !⁷

(... în zilele noastre, spectacolul este singura noastră șansă de a cunoaște libertatea absolută, și acest lucru se va adeveri și mai mult în viitorul apropiat. Precizez: libertatea absolută, pentru că n-are nimic de-a face cu libertățile de ordin social, economic sau politic !)

The dramatic art has also a **thaumaturgic quality** by its professed perpetuance of the sacred. Eliade envisages theatre as a unique way through which humanity can be 'saved'. Ieronim Thanase (from

⁶Mircea Eliade, Noaptea de Sânziene, vol. II (Paris, Ed. Ioan Cușă, 1971), p.147.

⁷Mircea Eliade, Nouăsprezece trandafiri (Bucharest, Ed. Românul, 1991), p.78.

Nineteen Roses), the stage producer with a monk's name, considers spectacle a magic art, an 'ultimate instrument of illumination, more precisely: of the crowd's salvation'⁸. The theatre can still reveal to the people the symbolical dimension of every gesture or special event. The underlying concept is that people live in a sacred world and they could be free, but their 'jail' is represented by their own 'opacity' to myth. In this context, attending a show, constitutes a preparation, a rite of passage with an initiatory role. One of the characters of Nineteen Roses mentions this acceptation of dramatic spectacle as 'a new eschatology or a soteriology, a salvation technique' ('o nouă eschatologie, sau o soteriologie, o tehnică a mântuirii')⁹. In this novel, the artistic performance is equivalent to a re-working of myths. People have to 'remember' to 'wake-up' from their *amnesia* and perceive the sacred dimension of the world. That is why the main function of the actors' play is to provoke a process of amnesia in their spectators. This is precisely what happens to the main character Pandele, who, after being exposed to a series of archaic scenarios, acquires liberty by going out of his time-dimension. We cannot fail to recognize here some of the ideas encountered in Eliade's scientific works. In his view, dances and pantomimes have a profound religious significance and the actor is in fact, an ancestral being. Analysing for example, the attitude of the Yuin tribe towards 'spectacle', Eliade notes that they actualize the mythical event, 'thing that allows the new initiates to assimilate the religious heritage of the tribe'¹⁰. The belief in **salvation through art** is also

⁸ibid., p.87.

⁹ibid., p.88.

¹⁰Mircea Eliade, Nașteri mistice (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1995), p.27.

expressed by one of the characters of the story 'A General's Uniforms':
 'As long as we are able to dress up and *play*, we are saved !' ('Cât timp
 ne vom putea costuma și vom putea juca, suntem salvați !')¹¹.

As we mentioned earlier, the actor's ability to 'create life' is limited
 to the imaginative power. Nevertheless, the artist is still endowed with
 a divine-like omnipotence in his own-made world. He can intervene in
 his creation and change it. Ieronim, the hero from 'A General's
 Uniforms' tries to extend these attributes over the real world, which is
 nothing, but another kind of show:

Not being afraid of anything means watching all the world's happenings as
spectacle. This means that we can intervene any time, by imagination, and we
 can modify the spectacle, the way we wish to...¹²

(A nu-ți fi frică de nimic înseamnă a privi tot ce se petrece în lume ca *spectacol*.
 Asta înseamnă că putem interveni oricând, prin imaginație, și putem modifica
 spectacolul așa cum vrem noi...).

The creative side of the actors' performance replenishes the lack of
 fantasy characterizing contemporary people's imagination. In order to
 help ordinary persons 'remember' their creative powers, the artists
 gather in choruses (allusion to the choruses of angels or the ancient
 dramaturgy) and, by certain mnemonic techniques and intonation, they
 attempt to trigger a process of anamnesis in their audience. This theme
 appears in three of Eliade's short stories: 'Incognito in Büchenwald',
 'Good-Bye !' and 'In a Barrack'. One of the heroes from 'Incognito in
 Büchenwald' complains about the individuals' loss of imaginative powers:

¹¹Eliade, 'Uniforme de General', *In Curte...*, p.434.

¹²*ibid.*, p.449.

Nearly nobody have imagination anymore. We live hard times. Who has the time to still imagine another world, with *different* people, a more poetic and therefore a truer world ?¹³

(Aproape nimeni nu mai are imaginație. Trăim vremuri grele. Cine mai are timp să-și imagineze o altă lume, cu *altfel* de oameni, o lume mai poetică și deci mai adevărată ?)

In Eliade's fiction, an important role is played by the **theatrical costumes and masks**. The special costumes are not worn by the actors so much to disguise their real personality, but to construct or acquire a new 'reincarnation'. Similar to a serpent's skin, changing a suit or a dress could signify: the cycle of metempsychoses, the aspiration towards immortality and the capacity of the artist to play with time and space (as costumes could be from different epochs and geographical areas). Pandele, the character from Nineteen Roses, explains the symbolism of the costumes which accomplish different modalities and existential situations of man: 'Every time he undresses a costume, the actor liberates himself from a certain modality of being.' ('De câte ori dezbracă un costum, actorul se eliberează de un anumit mod de a fi.')¹⁴. Laurian and Niculina, other two protagonists of the novel, not only change, as if by magic, their clothes while performing, but they change their appearance and 'age' too. Niculina, the modern version of a shamaness, wears a strange dress like an 'itinerant wardrobe' which contains many different accessories, permitting the actress to transform her aspect during representations. Pandele's secretary remained puzzled by her skill:

¹³Eliade, 'Incognito la Büchenwald', In Curte..., p.408.

¹⁴Eliade, Nouăsprezece..., p.31.

I did not understand how Niculina changed her T-shirt, in the beginning it was a silvery one, afterwards a black one, after that it took a ripe plum's colour, afterwards it became black again; I could not understand how the veils and scarves appeared and disappeared...¹⁵

(Nu înțelegeam cum își schimba Niculina tricoul, la început argintiu, apoi negru, apoi de culoarea prunelor coapte, apoi din nou negru; cum apăreau și dispăreau voalurile, eșarfele...)

In the novella 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats', three female characters: Zamfira, Arghira and Marina, have this skill of metamorphosis: they transform their look with the help of differently coloured dresses, or strange dresses, so many times modified, that they did not resemble anything any longer. The three women seem to be different reincarnations of a single woman, this idea hinting, in our opinion, at a possible identity between the teller of their story, the old teacher Fărâmbă, and the Wandering Jew. The same inclination to modify her clothes has the heroine Leana, from 'At Dionysus' Court'. After receiving as gifts several silk and velvet black dresses, 'she modified them all, she adapted them to her own style of elegance... .'('le modificase pe toate, le adaptase propriului ei gen de eleganță... .')¹⁶.

Apart from costumes, **the mask** plays a special role in Eliade's writings. Roland Barthes highlighted that 'the temptation of the absolute mask (the mask of antiquity, for instance) perhaps implies less the theme of the secret (as in the case with Italian half mask) than that of an archetype of the human face.'¹⁷ Eliade, in his turn, divided the types of masks into three categories: **ritual masks**, **war masks** and **spectacle masks**.¹⁸ However, the historian of religions specifies that ultimately, all

¹⁵ibid., p.44.

¹⁶Eliade, *In Curte...*, p.496.

¹⁷Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London, Paladin/Grafton Books, 1989), p.62.

¹⁸Eliade, *Symbolism...*, p.64.

practice of painting the head and body, the earliest known magico-religious disguise'¹⁹. Worn by **the living** or masks of **the dead**, they represent a superhuman state, triggering the transubstantiation of the wearer. In our view, Mircea Eliade used the symbolism of the mask in his fiction, mainly with two significations: **1) the 'camouflage' of the sacred in the profane** (the modern unrecognizability of transcendence) and **2) the realm of the dead**.

The idea of the mask's role as **disguising the sacred** appears in the novella 'At Dionysus' Court'. The heroine Leana, a 'bearer' of transcendent 'messages', tries to make people open themselves towards myths and perceive the sacred function of art. She is Eurydice and, at the same time, the archetype of the ultimate woman, Madonna Intelligenza. She not only sings archaic songs for ordinary people, but she refuses to put on fancy dresses or wear masks, in order to make those around her, 'see' and 'understand' the world of signs behind the world of appearances. In his journey to meet her, Adrian/Orpheus enters the land of the dead ('behind the rotunda with mirrors')²⁰, described as a 'ballo in maschera' ('a masked ball'). It is easy to recognize in this 'ballo in maschera' a Mystic, 'camouflaged' type of gathering. The search of Adrian/Orpheus for Eurydice is transformed into an initiatory seeking for Madonna Intelligenza, disguised as 'La Vedova'.²¹ The gathering takes place in the **realm of the dead** that

¹⁹ibid., p.64.

²⁰Eliade, *In Curte...*, p.512.

²¹Writing about the spiritual initiation through Love, Eliade analyses the role and meaning of 'La Vedova' in the *Fedeli d'Amore* movement: "'The Woman" symbolizes the intellectual transcendent, Wisdom. The love for a woman awakens the adept from the lethargy into which the Christian world fell because of the spiritual unworthiness of the Pope. In the writings of the *Fedeli d'Amore*'s members we encounter allusions to "a widow who is not a widow": she is *Madonna Intelligenza*, who remained "a widow" because her husband, the Pope, died for the spiritual life by dedicating himself exclusively to ephemeral things.' Eliade, *Nașteri...*, pp.164-65.

Eliade recurrently describes in his literary writings as carnival, party or masked ball. In his eschatological journey Adrian/Orpheus meets three young women wearing masks, and he has to guess his beloved one among them. But unlike the hero Gavrilescu from 'With the Gypsy Girls', who randomly tries his luck, Adrian/Orpheus is 'initiated', he knows that the riddle's answer is that they are all images of Death:

'They could be the same', thought Adrian... Because, as anybody can see, the masks, although different, *are the same*. To find out their identity I still have a handy means, just one: *a question*. But I will not ask them yet... Because, in fact, what sort of identity could I discover ? The woman that interests me is the same, under any mask.²²

('Ar putea fi aceleași', spuse Adrian... Căci, după cum se vede, măștile, deși diferite, *sunt aceleași*. Ca să le identific, mai am la îndemână un mijloc, unul singur: *o întrebare*. Dar încă n-am s-o pun... Pentru că, în fond, ce fel de identitate aş descoperi ? Cea care mă interesează pe mine e aceeași, sub orice mască.)

The connection between demonology, a nightmarish world and the idea of carnival is also present in the short story 'I, the Holy Devil and the Sixteen Puppets'. Eight figures disguised in domino²³ costumes, make a strange bet: they have to tell the story of their lives and the one who was considered to have had the most uninteresting life, was doomed to die while keeping his anonymity. But, to their horror, the main character who is the devil's creature starts to name the figures' identities, even though they were all masked. As the main hero is the only one who is going to die (by his choice), he is also the only one who remains anonymous (in death any identity is lost).

²²Eliade, In Curte..., p.522.

²³Dominoes are symbols for a transcendent condition: 'The geometrical design expresses the remote, the nonhuman, the transcendent.' Eliade, Symbolism..., p.69.

The **immobility of features** (the mask's main characteristic) highlights its transcendent trait: 'only gods or the dead present such immobility of expression...'.²⁴ Adrian/Orpheus from 'At Dionysus' Court' is the only one alive in death's realm, and the masks in the great room, which preserve a rigidity of death, make him feel uncomfortable:

Then his gaze fell upon the masks, which, petrified, scrutinized him from their tables, from the platform.

'What happens to them?' he asked anxiously. 'Why do they stand stone-still like that?'²⁵

(Atunci dădu cu ochii de măștile care-i priveau, împietrite, de la mese, de la estradă.

'Ce se întâmplă cu ei?' întrebă turburat. 'De ce-au rămas așa?')

In the novel The Light Dying Away, the mask is a symbol of depersonalization and alienation. The heroine Marta is anguished by the presentiment of death, by her 'solitude among masks'²⁶. The other characters feel like spoiled puppets in a world dominated by the Absurd. Cesare examines Jacob's face, sure that 'he will find his mask's ties'²⁷. Cesare himself undergoes initiatory experiences that destroy his Oneness, his perfect Self and disperse him into shattered pieces of foreign personalities, becoming 'from a whole and certain man, a man with one hundred masks.'²⁸. As a symbol of automatism the mask represents Paul's feeling of estrangement from this world, in the novel The Return from Paradise:

²⁴Eliade, Symbolism..., p.69.

²⁵Eliade, În Curte..., p.528.

²⁶Mircea Eliade, Lumina ce se stinge (Bucharest, Ed. Cartea Românească, 1931), p.376.

²⁷ibid., p.266.

²⁸ibid., p.73.

When I read, when I answer Mr Jerbea's questions, when I work for my boss, when I waste my time with some mammal - I am not myself. I catch the first mask that is handy and I behave with its specific reactivity.²⁹

(Când citesc, când răspund la întrebările d-lui Jerbea, când lucrez pentru șef, când îmi pierd vremea cu vreun mamifer - nu sunt eu. Apuc cea dintâi mască ce mi-e la îndemână, și mă port cu reactivitatea ei specifică.)

But in the whole of Eliade's fiction, the mask is associated with transcendancy and with the idea of time. It is the very symbolism on which the historian of religions focused in his scholarly writings:

Whatever sort of mask is worn, the wearer transcends earthly time. Whether ritual, funerary, or for any spectacle, the mask is an instrument of ecstasy. He who wears one is no longer himself, since he is projected beyond his temporal identity. He becomes 'other', even when the mask is his own portrait.³⁰

In a close analysis of the central role played by the symbolism of the actor in Eliade's fiction, this discloses a certain relationship between **theatre/art** and **religion**. Eliade found in theatrical time, a disguised/'degraded' version of liturgical time, both of them allowing an exit from profane time. The same process happened with the literary imagination, as being simultaneously mythical imagination as well, a mythical imagination that can get to the roots of metaphysical truths.

²⁹Eliade, Intoarcerea..., (1992), p.71.

³⁰Eliade, Symbolism, ..., pp.70-71.

THE JESTER

Another sort of artist is the jester, the artist of the paradox. From a psychoanalytical point of view he represents the first stage of infantilism, the return to childhood, although in our opinion, he could also signify the return to humanity's childhood, that is the mythical *illud tempus*. The buffoon also symbolizes the dark categories of the human psyché like: madness, uncertainty, anguish. For C. G. Jung³¹, he is the collective symbol of the shadow. The jester is the one who surpasses the limits without the others noticing it, he breaks conventions and because of his perfect disguise, he can do anything he wants. Not man, nor woman 'as if he were still a child, he is specially dressed, that is disguised'³². In Mircea Eliade's fiction the disguise of this wise fool is the very **symbol of the sacred 'camouflaged' in the profane** and it represents **the Golden Age of humanity**. It was also acknowledged that in literature the jester represented the ancient morality as he was hiding a great wisdom underneath his almost ritual 'cheekiness':

L'intervention du bouffon en littérature est l'intrusion de la morale, mais d'une morale à la façon de 'moralités' anciennes, ces 'soties' qui recèlent une grande sagesse de la vie et du monde ne sont qu'un spectacle plein de 'bruit et de fureur', et le plus fou n'est pas toujours celui qu'on pense.³³

It is in this context that Eliade makes use in his literary works of the jester's image. The mad boy from the early short story 'The Death of a Lunatic' is the fool who perceives the world differently from the others, a blue world that hints at the idea of 'another', supernatural world:

³¹ Olivieri et al., Dictionnaire... , p.35.

³² *ibid.*, p.35.

³³ *ibid.*, p.33.

'... my lunatic sees blue trees, blue birds, but this is something serious, very serious... .The fool sees the people blue !'('... nebunul meu vede pomi albaștri, paseri albastre, dar e ceva grav, foarte grav... . Nebunul vede oamenii albaștri !)'³⁴. In Romanian fairy-tales the other realm is always described as a world with blue trees, while the blue bird is the symbol of the unattainable ideal searched for by heroes, a sort of a Holy Grail. Similar to the shaman, who has to simulate madness in order to gain access to the secrets of the other worlds, the fool from the story has access to existential truths and this confers wisdom upon him. A revealing scene is the one in which the mad boy swallows some matches and, with the fire in his hands, he starts shouting: 'I found, I found!'.

The jester in Eliade's oeuvre is also the symbol of an **artist-oracle** who, in ancient times, would 'perform' for the gods. It is the change of audience (from the sacred one to the contemporary one which lost its direct access to the sacred) that obliged the artist to disguise himself as a jester. This way, 'camouflaged' as a fool, he was able to fulfil his ambivalent role: to spread his 'messages' to those who could 'understand' them and, at the same time, puzzle the uninitiated. This later function of **puzzling, as an initiatory way towards illumination** is reminiscent of the Japanese Rinzai Zen technique, in which the *koans* (mind-bending questions) are used to obtain *satori* (enlightenment). The buffoon challenges authority, and in his riddles might hide some truths of a transcendent nature. In this perspective Eleazar, one of the protagonists of The Return from Paradise, ascribes the jester's condition to Christ's: 'Christ as well was in his time a buffoon. I am not afraid of ridicule; a man alive seems always a buffoon amongst dead people.' ('Și Christos a fost la timpul lui bufon. Nu mi-e

³⁴Eliade, 'Moartea unui nebun', Maddalena , p.241.

teamă de ridicol; un om viu pare întotdeauna bufon printre morți.’)³⁵. This position of being the object of ridicule reminds one of the behaviour of certain monks in the Roman Empire, who deliberately provoked public opprobrium (‘Some monks used to make clothes from coloured patches for themselves (‘harlequins’) and they were behaving as if ‘out of their minds’...’)³⁶.

Often, the wise people and the buffoons (as counterparts) are inseparable, reflecting the continuous challenge between two types of ‘wisdom’: logic and folly. In one of his short stories, ‘The Man who Wanted to Keep Silent’, Eliade followed precisely this line of thought. One of the protagonists creates, by the power of his mind, an entire transcendent world, with Golem-like creatures. Falling in love with the daughter of a blind king, the hero breaks his vow of silence and speaks to the king and his people about his imaginary kingdom, making them ‘see’ his unique creations:

Look, this is the world which I kidnapped from the silence, a realm higher than the clouds and more difficult to reach than the region of death... These are the maidens of silence and these are the old men. ... And these are the wise ones, and these are the buffoons and these are the knights...³⁷

(Iată aceasta este lumea pe care eu am răpit-o tăcerii, tărâm mai înalt ca norii și mai greu de ajuns decât plaiurile morții... Acestea sunt fecioarele tăcerii, și aceștia sunt bătrânii. ... Iar aceștia sunt înțelepții și aceștia bufonii și aceștia cavalerii...)

In the story ‘A General’s Uniforms’ the buffoon’s decadence, from an artist of the gods, to an ordinary saltimbanc who makes people laugh in fairs, is expressed in a direct way:

³⁵Eliade, Intoarcerea..., (1992), p.105.

³⁶Mircea Eliade, Jurnal, vol. II (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1993), p.152

³⁷Eliade, ‘Omul care a voit să tacă’, Maddalena, p.127. The underlining is mine.

... he, the famous artist, the unsurpassed jester and juggler, had betrayed his real *vocation*, which was, in a certain way, *religious*, and he had become, like all the others in his guild, a simple craftsman of fairs, flattered and happy that he could amuse all sorts of people, from lords and ladies of castles to their farm hands and servants...³⁸

(... el, faimosul artist, neîntrecutul saltimbanc și jongleur își tradase adevărata lui *vocație*, care era, într-un anumit sens, *religioasă*, și ajunsese, ca toți cei din breasla lui, un simplu meșteșugar de bălci, flatat și fericit că poate amuza oameni de tot felul, de la castelani și castelane, la argați și slugile lor...)

In the betrayal of the buffoon's religious vocation Eliade envisages the betrayal of the sacred by the modern age.

In the novel Marriage in Heaven, the writer inserts³⁹ a medieval story recounted by Anatole France about a jester turned monk. Not being able to bring a better homage to the Virgin, he performed all the tricks and talents of his craft in front of the Madonna's statue. This story makes evident once again the connection between the artist/buffoon and the sacred. The jester is, in Eliade's fiction, one of the 'degraded' artists whose original 'vocation' was in essence religious.

³⁸Eliade, 'Uniforme de General', In Curte..., p.422.

³⁹Eliade, Maitreyi..., p.268.

THE BLIND PERSON

The symbolism of **the blind person** plays an emblematic role in Mircea Eliade's literary works. The wide dissemination - in time and space - of this symbolic figure accounts for its deep roots in the human psyché, as a representation of the **unconscious**:

From the blindfolded Eros-Cupid, forerunner of our modern libido, up to that 'Old King' who appears as a constellation in all countries' folklore, and alongside the so very famous and terrible Oedipus, the profound part of consciousness is represented by the blind character from the legend.⁴⁰

Integrating the symbolism of **the blind person** in the series: **double - devil - mirror - madness**, Gilbert Durand sustained the first interpretation of blindness as 'infirmity of intelligence', for the superficial, ordinary understanding of **blindness as being opposed to clear-sightedness**. Nevertheless, a second level of interpretation reveals **the link of the eye or eyesight with transcendency**, a relationship attested by universal mythology and also supported by psychoanalysis.⁴¹

In Eliade's fiction the symbolism of blindness could be given two main interpretations: 1) **'degradation', opacity towards the sacred** and 2) **transcendency, openness towards the Self, wisdom and approach of death**. In the first category come the novel The Light Dying Away and the story 'The Man who Wanted to Keep Silent'. The novel is a remake of the first man's primordial drama: the Fall. The perfect being, Cesare, lives a pure spiritual life, unaware of the materialistic world. Caught in the blaze provoked by Manoil, Cesare sins

⁴⁰Durand, Structurile..., p.114.

⁴¹ibid., pp.115, 187.

by throwing away his precious manuscripts in order to save the naked woman Melania (=Eve), who appears from the fire as a numinous symbol of the Anima. His punishment is a gradual weakening of his 'eyesight', that is a loss of his sacredness, his superhuman power. With just little time left before being seized by blindness, he embarks on an initiatory journey in the materialistic world he previously ignored. As on a path strewn with Pandora's malefic gifts, step by step, he becomes aware of all human vices: empty glory, money and greed, sexual perversions, false friendship, superficial love. The more he immerses himself in the 'profane', the more his eyesight 'deteriorates', that is his contacts with the sacred world are weakened.

The same idea of the Supreme Spirit 'blinded' by matter, appears expressed, in philosophical terms, in the short story 'Ivan'. The image of a dying soldier, Ivan, becomes the expression of the soul, 'jailed' in body, or the one of the spirit 'blinded' by matter:

You had in front of your eyes, as upon an interior screen, the image of Ivan, somehow buried in his own body. And you wanted to say that God, the Supreme Spirit, sometimes looks like that, captured, closed in Matter, blinded, alienated, ignoring his own identity... . You were thinking of the Gnostic myths, of the Hindu concepts about Spirit and Matter.⁴²

(Dumneata aveai în față, ca pe un ecran interior, imaginea lui Ivan oarecum înmormantat în propriul trup. Și voiai să spui că așa arată uneori Dumnezeu, Spiritul Suprem, capturat, închis în Materie, orbit, alienat, ignorandu-și propria lui identitate... . Dumneata te gândea la miturile gnostice, la concepțiile indiene despre Spirit și Materie.)

The same **loss of contact with the sacred**, made evident through **blindness**, is the theme of Eliade's early story 'The Man who Wanted to Keep Silent'. The king was blinded by a black magician and the only one who could make him 'see' is the silent traveller who had brought an

⁴²Eliade, 'Ivan', In Curte..., p.391. The underlining is mine.

imaginary world to life. The foreigner, in fact, 'teaches' him the art of active imagination and the path in this hidden world, situated at the same time inside and outside the 'dreamer'. While the king and his countrymen are caught in the vision of the traveller's wonderful world, the doctor of the court cannot see it. He is totally 'opaque', unable to perceive the creatures of the spirit as a consequence of his own disbelief in them.

In an intermediate state, between sacred and profane is the one-eyed mathematician Dayan, from the novella with the same name. Like Odhin from the Scandinavian mythology, Dayan's price for his wisdom is one of his eyes. In order to help him traverse different times and spaces, the Wandering Jew starts by a process of initiation: he moves the healthy eye of Dayan from the left orbit into the 'right' one. This enables the mathematician not only to see better, but to perceive the 'right' way, that is in the transcendent realm. This symbolic gesture lends itself to an interpretation connected with the Vedantin writings, whereby the left eye represents the moon and the past, while the right eye represents the sun and the future.⁴³ At the end of the novella, as soon as he acquired full wisdom, Dayan could 'see' with both eyes⁴⁴. The closeness of death is also an important factor in explaining the hero's supernatural sightedness (he sees through walls, in time and space).

Usually, in Eliade's fiction, the approach of death brings blindness, but a blindness of a transmundane nature, equivalent simultaneously to

⁴³For more information on this symbolism see Guénon, Fundamental Symbols..., p.294.

⁴⁴The perfect opposite of Dayan is another one-eyed character called Vădastra, from the novel The Forbidden Forest. In his case, his eye made of glass symbolizes precisely 'the spiritual infirmity', the ambitious man full of complexes and totally immersed into the profane life.

an 'isolation' to the profane world and an 'openness' towards the 'other', the sacred world. In the short story 'The Bridge', a blind old woman is led by a girl in a magic, eschatological journey towards her country where she wants to be buried. They do not have passports (symbol of the profane), but a book and a map. Their voyage is initiatory in character, similar to the one of Dayan and The Wandering Jew ('Dayan'). They cover geographical spaces and different times (the girl changes her ages) without turning from their path. The heroine from another story 'A General's Uniforms', the General's wife, gets blind before dying and, like an *itako miko*⁴⁵ in the Japanese tradition, she acquires nearly shamanic powers of divination. On her death bed she reveals the sacred dimensions of the world to her nephew, Ieronim Thanase, who, in his turn communicates this message further, to the others, through improvised shows.

Another character acquiring supreme wisdom before dying is the blind man called Moşu, from the story titled 'The Ditches'. He wakes up from his bed and in a ritual final effort leads the villagers towards a hollow made by dynamite. Taking the scattered stones in his hands, one by one, he attempts to show the others that the real treasure they were seeking for is their land with its mythical past. On their way from his home towards this spot, where he dies, the group of people accompanying Moşu is stopped by the German officer, Von Balthasar:

'But where do you want to take him ?' exploded von Balthasar... 'Can't you see that he is blind and deaf ?'

'He isn't blind', answered Ilaria, stopping and turning her head.

But Moşu pulled her towards him. He was stepping slowly, frail, and maybe he would have collapsed if Ilaria had not sustained him. ...

'He isn't blind. He knows where to go, but he doesn't want to tell us.' ⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Miko* is a shamaness. The majority of *miko* from the *itako* category are blind and have oracular powers which enable them to perceive the world, despite their infirmity.

⁴⁶ Eliade, 'Şanturile' In *Curte...* , p.354.

(‘Dar unde vreți să-l duceți ?’ izbucni von Balthasar... . ‘Nu-l vedeți că e orb și surd ?’
 ‘Nu e orb’, spuse Ilaria oprindu-se și întorcând capul.
 Dar Moșu o trase după el. Călca încet și șubred, și poate că s-ar fi prăbușit dacă nu l-ar fi sprijit Ilaria... .
 ‘Nu e orb. Știe unde vrea să meargă, dar nu vrea să ne spună.’)

The villagers contest Moșu’s blindness (which is obvious for von Balthasar) because they understand another thing by it. For them Moșu has great wisdom: he is not ‘blind’ except for the external world, and consequently he is able to orientate himself perfectly, like the souls on the eschatological journey.

In the novel The Forbidden Forest, **transcendancy and blindness** merge in the fulgurent image of a saint with whom Cătălina falls in love. She describes him simply: ‘I met a saint... . He is blind. I fell for him...’ (‘Am întâlnit un sfânt... . E orb. M-am îndrăgostit de el...’)⁴⁷.

Signifying 1) **degradation, opacity towards the sacred** or 2) **transcendent opening towards the Self, wisdom** and 3) **the closeness of death** as a supreme initiation, the blind person’s figure remains a recurrent symbol in Eliade’s fiction, a symbol moulded perfectly on his conception of the dialectic Sacred / Profane.

⁴⁷Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. I (1971), p.42.

THE MILITARY MAN / UNIFORM

In Mircea Eliade's literary co-ordinates the image of the military man has a special function: the one of 'creating' atmosphere. Sometimes the military men are **1) patriarchal, picturesque or beneficent figures**; at other times they **2) represent the traumatic forces of war**, or **3) embody virility, discipline and brutal force**. Among the **1) patriarchal figures** whose role is to provide a picturesque configuration is Agripina's father, from 'The Captain's Daughter'. His portrait is one of Eliade's most ironic descriptions:

The captain was waiting for him in front of the gate, in shirt and braces, smoking nervously. He was a middle-aged man, tiny, rather fat, with too short legs. His face was round, his eyebrows pinched, and he gathered his scarce hair from the top of his head and stuck it on his forehead, as if he was vainly trying to give himself a sarcastic and somehow ferocious expression.⁴⁸

(Căpitanul îl aștepta în fața porții, în cămașă și bretele, fumând nervos. Era un bărbat între două vârste, mărunțel, aproape gros, cu picioarele prea scurte. Avea fața rotundă, sprâncenele ciupite, și părul rar din creștet și-l adunase și lipise pe frunte, parcă ar fi încercat, zadarnic, să-și construiască o expresie sarcastică și oarecum feroce.)

Another mediocre character is Captain Manuilă, from the novella 'The Snake'. He is the profane man *par excellence* and his 'opacity' towards the sacred makes him ridiculous. The fact that he loses Dorina, his 'projected' bride, is explained by his too straightforward and narrow thinking. He is defeated in the tacit confrontation with Andronic who represents the forces of the sacred. The clash between the two is reduced to the old idea of conflict between the sacred and the profane. 'Memories from a Retreat', a short story written by Eliade when he was fifteen, describes a brief journey undertaken by an soldier (orderly) and

⁴⁸Eliade, 'Fata Căpitanului', *In Curte...*, p.126.

a child, in order to avoid an invasion of the enemy troops. Although the construction of the piece remains the work of a teenager, the personality of the soldier with a saint's name (Pavel) is framed by the writer in one of the finest psychological cameos of his fiction. As a matter of fact it is one of the few works of Eliade to present the military man as a symbol of caring protection. The writer does not make any physical portrait of Pavel, his image being constructed only by his gestures: he confronts the hostile Bulgarian soldiers with just a carbine, guards his little friend while this one is asleep and gives his own portion of bread to the child. But this sketch remains an exception among Mircea Eliade's writings. Usually the military men represent the **2) traumatic force of war**, as in the short stories 'Ivan' or 'The Ditches' and the novel The Forbidden Forest. In The Return from Paradise, the major Dragu is an elderly man who was traumatized by his experience on the front, in Moldavia. He makes an attempt to communicate his anguish to his son, David, in a delirious pseudo-monologue strewn with existential questions:

'Not death, I don't want to know what's death, that I'll find out by myself; another thing I want to know...: why did I survive, why did this misery called man's life happens... . A shell, you see it, it rolls you over, tears you to pieces; or somebody else catches it, stops it like in a net. The destiny, where is it, in the shell or in yourself ?...' ⁴⁹

('Nu moartea mă, nu vreau să știu ce e aia, am s-o aflu; altceva, ... de ce am trăit, asta vreau, de ce se întâmplă, mizeria asta, viața omului... Un obuz, îl vezi, te răstoarnă, te face praf; sau îl prinde cineva, îl oprește în drum, ca într-o plasă; destinul ? unde e, în obuz sau în tine ?...')

In spite of all the old man's trials, a 'communication' between him and his son remains impossible. The two of them, father and son, are

⁴⁹Eliade, Intoarcerea..., (1992), p.142.

distinct generations and the estrangement produced by the war in the first one cannot be realized by the cynical, hyper intellectualised son, who fights his emotions. Consequently the major becomes frustrated, and retreats more and more into his world of past heroic behaviour, losing touch with the present. David instead, has dreams of being the son of a glorious colonel with an adventurous life, who fought in the colonies, travelled all over the world and was recurrently injured in battles. His imagination creates a fictitious father who could describe to a circle of young men 'his nightly attacks in the dessert, his diplomatic missions among the tribes' leaders, his journeys in the North of Indochina...' ('atacurile lui de noapte în deșert, misiunile diplomatice la șefii triburilor, călătoriile lui în Nordul Indochinei...')⁵⁰. One of Eliade's beliefs at the time is expressed in this novel: the incompatibility between the generation of the war and the following one, who constituted the writer's own generation. (He expressed these views in twelve feuilletons published in the newspaper The Word, a series printed under the generic name of 'Spiritual Itinerary'.⁵¹)

The military men in Eliade's fiction stand for **3) discipline and brutal force** as well. The psychoanalytical point of view favors this interpretation, as 'the combative or warrior instinct', which is held to represent 'a deviation of the sexual instinct which aims to possess a territory by conquering it.'⁵² Alexandru, the hero from The Hooligans, is a sardonic young man who joins the army, just to understand 'the youths' thirst for *esprit de corps*, for military discipline and the life in

⁵⁰Eliade, Întoarcerea..., (1992), p.146.

⁵¹For more information on these articles see the excellent study of MacLinscott Ricketts in Mircea Eliade, The Romanian Roots, 1907-1945 (New York, Columbia University Press, 1988), pp.245-95.

⁵²Olivieri et al., Dictionnaire..., p.112.

common pushed to its extremes.’ (*‘setea tineretului pentru esprit de corps, pentru disciplina militară, pentru viața asociată dusă la extrem.’*)⁵³. It is no accident that a young girl commits suicide for the cynical Alexandru when he breaks off their affair.

But military brutal force is best exemplified in Eliade’s fiction by the special position he ascribed to **gendarmes** and **secret police forces**. the clash between a group of demonstrators and gendarmes is skilfully constructed by a nearly photographic technique employing a description-collage of fragmented movements and focusing on disparate elements:

The lieutenant who hits with his boot... The gendarmes who tread the passers-by under foot... Those bony and heavy hands, hands of public guards, charging with their rubber batons at the students aligned in front of the Faculty of Laws.⁵⁴

(Locotenentul care lovește cu cizma... jandarmii care calcă trecătorii în picioare... Măinile acelea osoase și grele, mâini de gardieni publici, șarjând cu bastoanele de cauciuc; studenții încolonați în fața Facultății de Drept.)

The secret police, with their specific role of traumatizing people, are treated by Eliade as **modern inquisitors**, similar to **eschatological divinities** whose role is similar: to torture. Through their psychological portraits, Eliade introduces a Kafkaesque surplus of tension, in opposition to the inoffensive army captains or the legendary colonels or generals from other writings. The secret police agents play a pivotal role in several short stories and novellas of Eliade: ‘The Cape’, ‘Les trois grâces’, ‘Dayan’, ‘In the Shadow of Lily’. Profane spirits, endowed with perspicacity and without scruples, the police employees treat cruelly those people whose superior condition they cannot understand because

⁵³Eliade, *Huliganii*, ... p.168.

⁵⁴Eliade, *Întoarcerea...*, (1992), p.168.

of their 'opacity' towards the sacred. The mathematician from the novella 'Dayan' is under two of his colleagues' surveillance: he will be interrogated by Albini (name that in Romanian reminds one of the word 'albină' = 'bee') and finally killed by the state security service. In 'The Cape' three of these modern evil forces (Nastase, Ghibercea, Pantazi) search, with sophisticated methods, for a conspiracy that does not exist, while in the story 'In the Shadow of a Lily', the Romanian emigrants' fear for the secret police, takes on absurd aspects. The suspects are sometimes **under surveillance** (e.g. Dominic Matei from 'Youth without Youth' or Dr Zalomit in 'Les trois grâces'), sometimes **endlessly interrogated** (e.g. the teacher Fărâmbă in 'The old Man and the Bureaucrats'), and some other times even killed in feigned accidents or under torture (e.g. Biriș in The Forbidden Forest, Calinic from 'Les trois grâces').

In general, there are two common denominators linking all the characters representing secret agents: 1) their **total incapacity to 'understand' the sacred** and 2) their **gradual tactic**, which usually starts with mistrust, surveillance, interrogation and ends in torture and death. The most interesting case in our opinion is presented by the tacit 'confrontation-interrogation' between the old teacher Fărâmbă and the security forces, in the novella 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'. Arrested without any reasonable reason (just because he wanted to visit a man suspected by police), Fărâmbă is subdued to a series of interrogations. Mythical figure strikingly reminiscent of The Wandering Jew, the old teacher has a memory of a collective type and starts to tell his inquisitors all sorts of 'stories'. In this process, Fărâmbă introduces the sacred dimension into the profane mentality of the agents, by following an ancient method of narrating: jumping from subject to

subject, from character to character, mixing ages and places, combining historical time with a mythical one and, predominantly significant, never ending his stories. This way, without even noticing, his inquisitors will be the ones subdued by Fărâmbă to a permanent 'interior interrogator'. As time goes by, the old man becomes more and more relaxed, in perfect opposition to his suspicious listeners, who gradually get more and more tense. The reason for this is that Fărâmbă - by his very complex 'confidences' (in reality 'camouflaged' mythical stories), mixed and contained one in another - proposes to his accusers an initiatory path through a labyrinth. The fact that the teacher's interrogators grow quickly tired, asking him to focus on specific aspects, is an indication of the old man's triumph over his enemies, by his ability to destroy their capacity of understanding and selection. Under the appearances of an amnesiac, he not only hides a collective, giant memory with roots in the mythical past, but he also freezes time. His interrogators change, some being fired or becoming suspected themselves, but Fărâmbă is always the same, closed in his own primordial Time, which the others refuse with obstination. Under the most dreadful circumstances the old teacher is a free man, while the 'others', the evil spirits of the contemporary society are 'jailed' in his stories, condemned to wander through the labyrinth of his rich imagination.

Another aspect that Eliade tackled in his fiction in an original way, is the implication of **the uniform** as playing a part in the personality make up of the military men. From expressing **1) a combative, virile spirit** (as in The Forbidden Forest) to representing **2) a heroic past** (as in 'A General's Uniforms'), up until **3) the initiatory function** into the mysteries of the Universe ('The Cape'), the uniform becomes in Eliade's writings a highly complex symbol.

Spiridon Vădastra, the character with a glass eye from The Forbidden Forest, has a nearly perverse attraction for the military uniform of his lieutenant friend, Băleanu. Both, frustration of his sexual instinct and the 'Caesar-complex' (the power complex) could be detected in his abnormal passion for the uniform he fraudulently puts on and wears in the street. The episode of stealing his friend's coat bears almost erotic connotations:

The military coat, of which Spiridon dreamt in his childhood, still exerted a great attraction for him. He looked at it with much care... . In the end he couldn't resist, he took off his coat and put on, nearly shivering, the lieutenant's jacket... Only in this uniform with enormous shoulders, with its manly cut line, did he find himself again; he had always imagined himself like that, and now he was contemplating his image, flesh and bone, as he had never caught sight of himself, except in his reveries.⁵⁵

(Haina de militar, pe care Spiridon o visase în copilărie, avea încă o foarte mare atracție pentru el. O privi cu multă atenție... . În cele din urmă nu se mai putu stăpâni, își scoase haina și îmbrăcă, aproape tremurând, vestonul de locotenent... De abia în această uniformă cu umeri enormi, cu linia bărbătesc tăiată, se regăsea pe el însuși; așa se văzuse el întotdeauna, și acum se contempla în carne și oase așa cum nu se întrezărise decât în propria lui închipuire.)

Unlike the significance of the uniform in The Forbidden Forest, in the short story 'A General's Uniform' the uniform represents the heroic past and accomplishes the same function as the ritual costumes of archaic peoples: the link with transcendence. The 'search-exploration' of two youngsters for gala uniforms in the garret of an old house takes on initiatory traits. After putting on the 'discovered' uniforms, the boys descend in the dining room where one of them - a talented precocious actor - reveals their reason for wanting the uniforms of his ancestor, the General:

⁵⁵Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. I (1991), p.55.

... in a week or two, we play *Hamlet* at the experimental theatre, *our* theatre. I shall play Hamlet's father, and how could I express more clearly a phantom's condition than wearing this uniform of a Romanian General, the uniform of a hero from the First World War ?⁵⁶

(... într-o săptămână, două, jucăm *Hamlet* la teatrul experimental, la teatrul nostru. Eu voi interpreta pe tatăl lui Hamlet, și cum aş putea exprima mai clar condiția de fantomă decât îmbrăcând această uniformă de general român, uniforma unui erou din primul război mondial ?)

The fact that the teenager Ieronim wants to play masked and to be at the same time Hamlet and the phantom of Hamlet's father reinforces the symbolical **interrelationship between uniforms and transcendency**. An **initiatory function** as well has the cape of Zevedei, from the story 'The Cape'. The uncle of the hero, a colonel who died nearly a hundred, represents the symbol of another, mythical time. Zevedei wears his ancestor's uniform in an attempt to transfer the colonel's personality to his own. The unique cape from the feudal epoch not only contributes to a differentiation of Zevedei from the others⁵⁷, but becomes a concrete way of perpetrating the sacred. The epaulets (signifying the stars, the sacred) of the cape were covered with patches, suggesting the 'camouflage' of transcendency in the profane world.

Like the **mask** for the **actor**, the **uniform** is for the **military man** something evident and, at the same time, a **disguise**, a symbol of ***coincidentia oppositorum*** and ultimately of anything **sacred** in the world, meaning 'something else' while remaining the very same thing.

⁵⁶Eliade, 'Uniforme de General', In *Curte...*, p.429.

⁵⁷One of the characters remarks: 'Zevedei is a strange man; he wants to be different from other people and then he resorts to any distinctive sign...' . Mircea Eliade, 'Pelerina', *Nuvele inedite* (Bucharest, Ed. Rum-Irina, 1991), p.22.

WATER / RAIN / SNOW / THIRST; MIRROR; ISLAND; CAVE

Motto: What persists above all is the ambivalent feeling of fear and attraction to water which at once destroys... and germinates, which at once kills and assists birth.

(Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, p.205)

WATER / RAIN / SNOW / THIRST

The symbolism of water is complex and takes part, according to Eliade (Patterns in Comparative Religion) in at least two archetypal lines: spiral snail - woman - water - fish - fertility and water - cosmic cave - happiness - Fertility - Wisdom. In order to analyse Eliade's fiction, we have chosen, from the plethora of meanings conveyed by this symbol, three main co-ordinates, preponderantly used by him: **1) Eros-Thanatos - Rebirth**; **2) Time** and **3) Sacrality**. According to Gilbert Durand, the water's waves symbolizes the woman's plaits ('the hair suggests the aquatic image')¹ or the menstrual cycle. Now these are attributes quintessential to femininity. The women figures linked with water, apart from being endowed with malefic forces, have also and irresistible charm that goes beyond the conscious level of their victims. Their relationship to water (especially to the attractive and destructive qualities of the wave) accounts for the woman's seductive attributes. Also, through its germinative powers, implying **fertility and**

¹Durand, Structurale..., p.121.

sensuality, water is the perfect complement to orgies. Like the earth, the liquid unleashes the creative forces. In Eliade's novel The Hooligans, the author describes the orgy of a group of adolescents, a carousal not randomly happening near the sea. Like the priestesses in the sacred temples of antiquity, the mystical young woman Irina is seized by a licentious impulse:

Next morning, the matutinal holiday makers could see her on the beach, naked, surrounded by a group of drunk young men, trying to balance three glasses of champagne on the expanse of skin between her breasts and navel.²

(A doua zi de dimineață, vilegiaturiștii matinali au putut-o vedea pe plajă, goală, înconjurată de un grup de tineri beți, încercând să echilibreze trei pahare de șampanie pe bucata de piele dintre sâni și buric.)

But water means **thanatos** as well. Its flow and destructive powers gave birth to the mortuary significations that a great many traditions ascribed to water. From the classic image of Acheron, Styx, Phlegeton and up to the biblical Deluge, water was considered a great epiphany of death.³ In Eliade's system of thought it symbolizes more a dissolution which leads to a rebirth:

... both at a cosmic level and at an anthropological level, the immersion into Waters is equivalent not to a definitive disappearance, but to a temporary reintegration into the non-differentiate, followed by a new creation, by a different life or by a 'new man', depending on the moment which could be: cosmic, biological or soteriological.⁴

In his fiction, Mircea Eliade used this particular acceptance of water symbolism in writings like 'Ivan', The Light Dying Away and 'The Snake'. In the short story 'Ivan', the image of the river wrapped in grey mist

²Eliade, Huliganii..., p.34.

³Durand, Structurile..., p.117.

⁴Mircea Eliade, Sacrul și profanul (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1995), pp.113-14.

re-edits the significance of the river Styx. Reaching the water is the goal and the end of a journey undertaken by a group of soldiers:

The river was flowing slowly, majestically, silent, a few hundred metres in front of them. Its other edge couldn't be seen because the rain continued to fall, fine, as if it was weaving a veil of fog, which the uncertain, pale light through which the dawn could already be guessed, was unable to penetrate.⁵

(Fluviul curgea lin, majestuos, tăcut, la câteva sute de metri în fața lor. Nu i se zărea celalt mal, căci ploaia continua să cadă, mărunță, țesând parcă o perdea de măgură, pe care lumina incertă, palidă, în care se ghiceau deja zorile, nu izbutea s-o strapungă.)

A funerary significance as well has the sea in The Light Dying Away. Threatened with a gradual blindness, the 'fallen' Cesare decides to reach the sea, before losing his eyesight. The choice is not fortuitous as water regenerates, purifies and restores the primordial Time:

Immersion in water symbolises a return to the pre-formal, a total regeneration, a new birth, for immersion means a dissolution of forms, a reintegration into the formlessness of pre-existence; and emerging from the water is a repetition of the act of creation in which form was first expressed. Every contact with water implies regeneration...⁶

Consequently the final scene in which Cesare enters and emerges from the sea is highly symbolic. He returns a strong man and is able to destroy his evil double (personified by Manoil).

A complex view is expressed in the novella 'The Snake', where the feminine-erotic symbolism of water is conjugated with the one of death. In this case water represents a boundary between life and death, profane and sacred. In order to enter the realm of her supernatural

⁵Eliade, 'Ivan', In Curte..., p.402.

⁶Eliade, Patterns..., pp.188-89.

lover, Dorina, the heroine from the story, has to 'die' and be 'born' again, thus achieving a mythical condition. The lake which she traverses in dream has the function of a primordial matrix and her immersion in water acquires not only an eschatological value ('Immersion is the equivalent, at the human level, of death...')⁷, but also means a regression into the pre-formal, undertaken in order to obtain a sacred initiation:

... Dorina stopped, shivering. It seemed to her that in front, beyond the threshold, there were waters. Hidden but deep, black, cold waters, which an unaccustomed eye would have taken for a carpet.
 'I'm scared', she whispered.
 'Don't be afraid, you won't get drowned', the woman calmed her.⁸

(... Dorina se opri, tremurând. I se părea că dincolo, peste prag, este apa. O apă ascunsă, dar adâncă, neagră, rece, pe care un ochi nedibaci ar fi luat-o drept covor.
 'Mi-e frică', sopti ea.
 'Nu te teme, nu te-neci', o liniști femeia.)

There, under the water, she enters the castle of her fiancé, the Serpent, and has access to the underworld mysteries. Her final voyage on the lake (in a boat) has the symbolic implication of a return to the origins, in the primordial Time: 'Water purifies and regenerates because it nullifies the past, and restores - even if only for a moment - the integrity of the dawn of things'⁹. Finally, on the paradisiacal island, she attains the condition of a mythical being and can see with new eyes the sun-rising, understanding it as a re-enacting of Creation.

The same mixture of **eros and thanatos** symbolized by water is present in the short story 'Stone Diviner'. Adriana, nicknamed 'the Empress' is famous for her beauty and her spectacular swimming under

⁷ibid., p.194.

⁸Eliade, 'Șarpele' *Domnișoara...*, vol. I, p.215.

⁹Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.195

the sea. Her femininity *is redolent of* the series of ambivalent figures from the Greek epic: Circe, Calypso, the Sirens. Adriana exorcizes the main hero who waits for her in trance, as for the predestined woman from another life:

But he had seen her already, swimming unusually quickly, ... and he did not dare to move, as if all his blood would have suddenly trickled out of his veins. ... He caught himself late, waiting for her, smiling and happy at the same time...¹⁰

(Dar o zărise deja, înotând neobișnuit de repede, ... și nu mai îndrăzni să se miște, parcă tot sângele i s-ar fi scurs deodată din vine. ... Târziu, se trezi că o așteaptă zâmbind și fericit în același timp...)

Another concept linked to the water symbolism is **Time**. The idea of irreversible time is connected to the flowing of waters: 'Water is the epiphany of time's ire, it is the definitive clepsydra'¹¹. The best connection between the idea of water and temporal duration is made by Eliade in his novel Isabel and the Devil's Waters. The main hero, nicknamed 'the Doctor' (an alter ego of the writer himself) is caught in an initiatory labyrinth, a consequence of his travelling to India. His maze has not only a spatial and qualitative dimension, but a temporal one too. Changing cultures means - at a certain level - changing the pattern in which the time flows. While the hero found himself projected in the non-homogenous time of India (with its intermittence of profane and sacred dimensions), he fights with his 'native' time, the time of his country, which flashes into his mind, disrupting the stream of his new life:

¹⁰Eliade, 'Ghicitor în pietre', În Curte..., p.100.

¹¹Durand, Structurile..., p.117.

I had an alive and a dead memory. And the thought of the life water and death water from fairy-tales... was forcing me to close the book and admit that, like that Prince Charming, I could kill myself (that is out of self-forgetfulness) and I could rise from the dead (in the sense of experiencing the feeling of presence) only by drinking from those two precious waters.¹²

(Aveam o memorie vie și alta moartă. Iar gândul apei vii și apei moarte din basme... mă silea să închid cartea și să recunosc că, asemenea aceluia Făt-Frumos, eu mă puteam ucide (în sensul de uitare de sine) și mă puteam învia (în sensul sentimentului de prezență) numai bând din cele două ape nestemate.)

An essential characteristic of water upon which Mircea Eliade insists in his scientific studies is its **sacredness**. The historian of religions makes evident the quality of water to confer **prophetic gifts** upon certain people. He analysed the Greek tradition whereby, for example, oracles were situated near waters and the *pythia* prepared for divination by drinking water from the Kossotis fountain. In Eliade's opinion 'these traditions show very clearly the sacred importance and consecrating power of water'¹³. Also the ritual lustrations and purifications with water serve 'the purpose of bringing into the present for a fleeting instant "that time", that *illud tempus*, when the creation took place; they are a symbolic re-enactment of the birth of the world or of the "new man" '¹⁴. Eliade made use of the water symbolism in this acceptance (as endowed with consecrating power) in his novella 'Dayan'. During a journey in space and time, Dayan has to discover, with Ahashverus' help, his own Self and he undergoes for this a series of initiatory trials. One of these consists in choosing the right stream of water (on the right-hand side) to appease his thirst. Obviously, Dayan's journey is doubled by an eschatological labyrinth with an initiatory value, the funereal connotations being otherwise implied by the hero's thirst:

¹²Eliade, *Isabel...*, p.49.

¹³Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.210.

¹⁴*ibid.*, p.212.

Orobete made his way in a hurry, nearly running, towards the grove. He knelt in front of the source, he united his hands like a cup, and he started to drink avidly.

'Dayan!' he heard a voice calling him, 'you chose right, but don't drink too quickly.'¹⁵

(Orobete se îndreptă cu grabă, aproape alergând, spre crâng. Ingenunche în dreptul primului izvor, își împreună mâinile ca o cupă, și începu să bea, lacom. 'Dayan !' se auzi strigat din urmă, 'ai ales bine, dar nu bea prea repede'.)

The interdiction of drinking too much liquid is related to the sacredness of water. In fact Dayan drinks 'wisdom', 'knowledge' and 'death'. That is why the Wandering Jew advises him to be moderate. As in 'initiation rituals, water confers a "new birth" '¹⁶, Dayan is a new being, endowed with supra-individual powers, who has access to original wisdom and eternity.

In general, in Eliade's literary oeuvre the water symbolism occupies an essential position enhancing the richness of the texts. The motifs of the **rain** and **snow** are also employed by Eliade in his fiction, the first to signify a **regenerative / disintegratory personality change** and the second to imply the **imminence of transcendence of another realm**. Although the motif of the rain appears in many of his writings ('Ivan', 'Stone Diviner', The Forbidden Forest, 'Dayan'), there are two literary works that are exemplary in this sense: the novella 'Youth without Youth' and the novel The Hooligans. Dominic Matei, the main character from 'Youth without Youth' is hit by lightning and instead of dying he suffers a process of rejuvenation. For Petru Anicet, the hero from The Hooligans, the storm in which he is caught represents a symbolical parallel reflecting his personality change. The episodes describing the three coloured lightnings are pivotal for the novel's

¹⁵Mircea Eliade, 'Dayan', La Umbra unui Crin - Proză Fantastică, vol. V (Bucharest, Ed. Fundației Culturale Române, 1992), p.145. The underlining is mine.

¹⁶Eliade, Patterns..., p.189.

psychology. Similar to a crumbled house, Petru's personality begins to shatter in synchronicity with his reactions during the storm:

... a green flame, flickering, blinded him, immediately followed by an explosion... . As if the house would have crumbled. Petru instinctively put his hands over his eyes and he bent his ~~shoulders~~ to avoid being hit by something. A terrible void inside him, inside his thorax, in his stomach, in his neck; as if all his being emptied suddenly, without blood, his knees started to tremble. He no longer felt his bones or any verticality.¹⁷

(... o vâlvătaie verde, palpitând, îl orbi, urmată imediat de o explozie... . Parcă s-ar fi surpat casa. Petru duse instinctiv mâinile la ochi și-și plecă umerii, să nu-l lovească ceva. Un gol cumplit înăuntru, în piept, în pânțece, în grumaz; parcă toată făptura lui s-ar fi golit deodată, suptă de sânge. Genunchii începură să-i tremure; nu-și mai simțea nici un os, nici o verticalitate.)

The metamorphosis is obviously transmuted from an exterior level to an interior one. After this experience, Petru Anicet is a 'different' man, stronger in his acts, determined to push 'experience' to its extremes and overcome any moral obstacles that might interfere with his convictions. The rain made him undergo an initiatory death and rebirth, a thing that conferred on him a surplus of energy. He became a perfect 'hooligan', able to experience anything, freed from any interdictions and limitations.

The **motif of snow** as well acquires multiple significations in Eliade's fiction. The main symbolical translation of 'snow' in his writings is **transcendancy, another realm**, accessible only to a few people of 'superior' condition, who are initiated into the sacred and have a knowledge of myths. The circumstances in which the symbolism of the snow is expressed are varied: Haruni, a character from The Light Dying Away dies in the snow; Ileana's magic car - death vehicle - from The Forbidden Forest is imagined by Ștefan as covered in snow; the writer Pandeale (Nineteen Roses) disappears into another realm while travelling in a sledge in the snow and so forth. The **regenerative powers** of

¹⁷Eliade, Huliganii ..., p.102.

snow could change the profane level into a transmundane, sacred one; a certain time into another. For Mr Lecca from The Hooligans, the snow triggers memories of his own self, from forty years ago:

He was feeling rejuvenated, this night. The fragrance of snow, the darkened sky, his lonely walk through the park - all these were making him return in a time he did not re-live for long. He discovered with emotion that the fresh snow smelled identically with the one from forty years ago.¹⁸

(Se simțea întinerit, în astăseară. Mirosul de zăpadă, văzduhul întunecat, plimbarea lui singuratică prin parc - toate acestea îl întorceau într-un timp pe care de mult nu-l mai retrăise. descoperi cu emoție că tot așa mirosea zăpada proaspătă, acum patruzeci de ani.)

The epiphany of the snow as revealing mysteries of a divine essence followed Eliade himself in his reveries. In this autobiography he notes one of his transcendent revelations:

At dawn, when I went to bed, the trees were filled with snow. In the light of the lampposts, they looked artificial. As if somebody put them there stealthily - it was enough to 'realize' this *as if somebody*, to feel a passionate, thrilling fervour, which sprang up from my depths and cut my respiration.¹⁹

(În zori, când m-am dus să mă culc, copacii erau încărcăți de zăpadă. La lumina felinarelor păreau artificiale. Ca și cum cineva i-ar fi pus acolo pe furiș - mi-a fost de ajuns să 'realizez' acest *ca și cum cineva* pentru a resimți o fervoare pasionată, înfiorătoare, care țâșnea din profunzimi și îmi tăia respirația.)

Another motif which appears with frequency in Eliade's narrative is **thirst**. It has to be underlined that thirst is linked to **alienation** at a superficial level only and that its fundamental meaning is expressed by **death**. As Eliade underlined in his book The Island of Euthanasius, in a mythical sense 'the water that appeases the dead person's thirst ends the experience, helping him to truly "die", to definitively detach himself from the human condition.' ('apa care

¹⁸ibid., p.324.

¹⁹Eliade, Jurnal, vol. I, p.341.

potolește setea mortului curmă experiența, ajutându-l să “moară” cu adevărat, să se desfacă definitiv de condiția umană.’)²⁰. This explains why all the characters of the Eliadean fiction who suffer from thirst are related in one way or another with death. Iancu Gore from the short story ‘Twelve Thousand Head of Cattle’ re-lives an episode from the past (an air-raid) and by witnessing the other people’s last moments he undergoes an initiatory death. The piano teacher from ‘With the Gypsy Girls’ is not able to calm his terrible thirst that represents a preliminary stage in his eschatological journey in the prostitutes’ house. This particular novella is based on a concept that Eliade expressed in his religious studies:

In none of the various conceptions of death, do the dead die completely: they are given an elementary form of existence; it is a regression, rather than a total extinction. While waiting... to be finally delivered, the soul of dead *suffer* and that suffering is generally expressed as a *thirst*.²¹

Thirst as a **transitional phenomenon** from the profane to the transcendental level is rendered valuable in the novella ‘Dayan’ and the last of Eliade’s novels Nineteen Roses. During his travelling in different times and spaces, Dayan becomes very thirsty. This shows not only that he is undergoing an eschatological journey, but hints at his ‘thirst’ for wisdom as well, his desire for acquiring the knowledge of the absolute truth, that is the ‘ultimate equation’. As Mircea Eliade wrote in his study ‘Locum refrigerii’, the human condition’s torment was expressed in religions by ‘thirst’: ‘The maximum of human suffering was always expressed by “thirst”. The more the man suffers, the more he is thirsty for God, for truth, for tranquillity, for love’. (‘Maximul de suferință omenească a fost formulat întotdeauna prin “sete”. Cu cât omul suferă

²⁰ Mircea Eliade, Insula lui Euthanasius (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1993), p.82.

²¹ Eliade, Patterns..., p.198.

mai mult, cu atât e mai însetat de Dumnezeu, de adevăr, de liniște, de iubire.')²².

Dayan's **thirst for knowledge** could be equated with the **thirst for 'freedom'** of Pandele, the main hero from Nineteen Roses. Pandele, at some point in his youth, suffered an amnesia following which his life changed radically. The crucial detail in this episode he failed to remember until late in life, was his terrible thirst, a transmundane thirst that could not be appeased with water:

For some moments I didn't feel anything, as if I swallowed air, and sleepy as I was, the terror seized me: I wondered whether I could ever quench my thirst. I continued to drink, more and more frightened.²³

(Câteva clipe nu simțeam nimic, parcă aș fi înghițit aer, și somnoros cum eram, m-a cuprins groaza: nu cumva n-am să-mi pot potoli niciodată setea ? Am continuat să beau, din ce în ce mai speriat.)

The fear had the value of an initiation into a superhuman condition. Only the souls of the dead, the spirits are tormented by an insatiable thirst. Consequently Pandele's amnesia is triggered during an eschatological / transcendent adventure and it is precisely the terror of encountering the profane death that provoked his loss of memory. In conformity to Eliade's views, love and death, if merged, can help a mortal to surpass his limited condition and attain complete freedom. Love was represented in the novel by 'Eurydice', an actress with whom Pandele had a one-night adventure, in a solitary cottage, situated in the woods. Next morning, awakened by 'thirst', he encountered Death under the form of a blonde woman (a 'fair' fairy) who made him a sign in the window and disappeared. Later, the male secretary of Pandele, Eusebiu, while in the same magic cottage, feels a strange thirst, a

²²Mircea Eliade, Op. cit., in Drumul spre Centru (Bucharest, Ed. Univers, 1991), p.218.

²³Eliade, Nouăsprezece..., p.141.

consequence of his partial initiation into the mysteries of the sacred (he was present at some mythical spectacles). But the secretary cannot accede to a transmundane condition like his mentor, as he 'sinned' by falling asleep during the ritual shows. Pandeale had suffered from the amnesia of the original man who forgot the sacred. It is a team of actors who help him remember his 'thirst' for a divine condition enabling him to transcend space and time, thus acquiring absolute freedom.

All the symbolic series water - rain - snow - thirst have, in Eliade's fiction, the existential meanings linked to the cycle birth - life - rebirth. Through their richness the symbols pervade the texts and their function of sustaining some of the most elaborate thought constructions of the author can be easily remarked.

MIRROR

Motto: The trees were rosy, the grass was glittering, the lake was like a mirror of gold.

(Mircea Eliade, 'The Snake', p.237)

Among the many representations of the **water series** one of the most often encountered in Eliade's fiction is **the mirror**. Gilbert Durand equated the mirror with the procedure of halving the ego's images and he considered it the symbol of the dark double of consciousness.²⁴ Eliade used the mirror in his literary works to express four main concepts: **1) the obscure double**; **2) the narcissistic image**; **3) femininity** and **4) the threshold of another realm**.

The mirror reflecting the **obscure double** appears in the novel Isabel and the Devil's Waters. The main character (called 'the Doctor') has a conscience crisis after his physical experience with the young sportsman, Tom:

Tom was sleeping. His wall was in the dark, my wall was in the light. The fan was wheezing softly and the projection of my bust among the Japanese paintings seemed an enchantment, an image in a magic mirror. My thoughts were chasing one another, were coming back, were descending into depths. Into the depths of a soul with a memory split in two halves.²⁵

(Tom dormea. Peretele lui era în umbră, peretele meu în lumină. Ventilatorul șuiera ca un zvon și proiecția bustului meu printre cadrele japoneze părea o vrajă, o imagine de oglindă magică. Gândurile mele se fugăreau, se întorceau înapoi, se coborau în adânc. În adâncul unui suflet cu memoria ruptă în două jumătăți.)

²⁴Durand, Structurile..., p.122.

²⁵Eliade, Isabel..., p.49.

The book is constructed on a play of mirrors, the main hero suffering from intermittent splits of personality, and many times being taken over by his Shadow. In this novel, a common feature of Mircea Eliade's literary writings appears, that is to say a phenomenon we may call 'the mirror syndrome'. When his characters suffer from disintegration of the ego or madness, or have suicidal tendencies, it is the symbol of the mirror that announces the crisis.

One of the most bizarre Eliadean short stories, 'The Thirsty-First of December' is set in a psychiatric asylum. The writing is constructed using a flash-technique that reveals disparate images from the hospice mixed with fragments of the psychiatrist's thoughts. In a gloomy atmosphere, the author makes a subtle description of a gradual seizure that leads the doctor of the asylum to lose his mind. The situation is paradoxical, as the only security man in the hospice who accepted to work on New Year's Eve is afraid not of the mentally ill interned, but of the medic's looks announcing the imminence of a turning point. His presentiments were right, as after switching off the lights in order to calm the patients, the security man was strangled in cold blood by the already mad doctor. The unleashing of the crisis is announced by the medic's staring in a mirror:

He had looked in the mirror. His physiognomy had amazed him this night. And it shouldn't surprise him. He was frightened looking at his features. He hissed words, until his face disappeared in the fog and his eyes only remained there. Two fixed, foreign eyes, which he didn't recognize and which scared him like an abyss.²⁶

(Privise oglinda. În noaptea aceasta îl uimise chipul lui. Și nu trebuia să-l uimească. S-a infiorat privind-și chipul. A șuierat cuvinte, până ce fața i s-a pierdut în ceață și nu i-au mai rămas decât ochii. Doi ochi fiți, străini, pe care nu-i recunoștea și care îl înspăimântau ca o prăpastie.)

²⁶Eliade, 'Treizeci și Unu Decembrie', Maddalena..., p.75.

The tension created between the psychopathic patients and their doctor, who murdered the security man, takes on a complex psychological aspect. This story, written by Eliade (on 31 December, 1926) when he was nineteen, already reveals his literary inclination for cinematographic effects and original discrepant situations.

The **mirror as prelude to madness** appears in a sketch of a story that Eliade ultimately abandoned: 'The Water from the Basin'. The author starts the piece with the apparently normal thoughts of an adolescent called Lucian, who decides to write a novel titled *A Madman's Torment*. But little by little all sorts of ideas invade the boy's mind: about his father, a clerk who died insane; about his hysterical mother, a nurse who during the day was studying botanics and strangled children at night; about his difficult courses at school. He is seized by masochistic violence and starts to injure himself up to the point in which is finally discovered by his landlord 'pale and smiling, soaked in water and with his mirror broken.' ('palid și zâmbitor cu apa vărsată pe el și cu oglinda spartă.')

In the novel The Return from Paradise the **broken mirror** constitutes the symbol of a **broken ego**. The hero Pavel Anicet admits in his introspections that his personality is in disintegration and compares his Self to a broken mirror:

Why can't I maintain myself in the same tension and on the same position for a longer period ? Why do I crumble and contradict myself like a smashed mirror ?²⁷

(De ce nu mă pot menține eu la aceeași tensiune și aceeași poziție mai mult timp ? De ce mă risipesc și mă contrazic, ca o oglindă spartă ?)

²⁷ Eliade, 'Apa din lighean', Maddalena ..., p.238.

²⁸ Eliade, Intoarcerea..., pp.217-18.

This symbolic image of the mirror announces the future suicide of Pavel Anicet. If for this character the mirror reflects his own shattered ego, for David Dragu, a hero with a strong personality, it becomes a **narcissistic double** of the Self. Pavel tries to understand David's perspective : 'The mirror is the only object appreciated by Dav; it is not faked, it is not feminine, that is what he says. What did Dav mean by that ?... ('Oglinda e singurul obiect apreciat de Dav; nu e trucată, nu e feminină, așa spune el. Ce-o fi vrând să înțeleagă Dav ?...')²⁹.

In the early fiction of Eliade the mirror represents the symbol of the Self's crisis, while in his later writings, the mirror becomes **a hierophany, the image of a transcendent realm** whose borders with the profane world are nothing else but the surface or the edge of the mirror itself. The 'chosen' ones could even have an initiatory journey into an underworld with mirror effects, like Dorina, the heroine from the novella 'The Snake', who is led by a woman into another realm: 'She took her by the hand and she showed her the back of the room. It looked as if another room was there and at the end of this other room, another one appeared, without end, as amongst mirrors.' ('O luă de mână și-i arată fundul odăii. Parcă se deschidea o altă încăpere acolo și la capătul ei alta, la nesfârșit, ca între oglinzi.')³⁰. The underworld looks like an infinite room, rich in lights and covered in mirrors and the reigning atmosphere amongst the dead people is one of carnival. This **funerary connotation** of the mirror's symbolism reminds the function of the reflecting surface as receptacle for the 'soul-shade' among the shamans of Northern Manchuria: 'Looking into

²⁹ibid., p.79.

³⁰Eliade, 'Șarpele' Domnișoara..., vol. I, p.214.

the mirror, the shaman is able to see the dead person's soul³¹. In the novella 'With the Gypsy Girls', the magic house of the three girls contains a looking glass that restrains the real world's space, while dilating certain scared dimensions (represented by separate folding-screens), merged inside the reflecting surface: 'in fact, what he was seeing were just two or three separate folding screens which united their images in a large mirror with greenish-gold reflections.' ('de fapt, ceea ce vedea el erau doar două sau trei paravane separate care-și împreunau imaginile într-o mare oglindă cu ape verzi-aurii'.)³² The mirror is in fact a sacred centre that 'doubles' the image of the profane world with a mythical one. The whole room of the Gypsies is otherwise full of folding screens and mirrors, all symbols of borders between the transcendent realm and the profane one, indicating the alternance of the 'normal' space with some sacred breaches. Apart from these meanings, the mirrors are also related to the **femininity** of the three young girls. Like a new Ariadne, one of the Gypsy girls leads the hero through folding-screens and mirrors that form an eschatological labyrinth.

Similar to its role in this novella the mirror represents **femininity and another realm** in another writing, 'At Dionysus' Court'. The main character, Adrian, 'had to turn round a circular hall with mirrors, towards which all the women seemed to direct their steps' ('trebuia să ocolească rotonda cu oglinzi, către care păreau că se îndreaptă toate femeile')³³. The mirror is also seen by the hero like a green cave and the symbolism of the cave is strongly linked to the image of the woman who undresses. Again, the centre of the 'hotel' (a modern disguised version of the underworld) is by 'a too large mirror', slightly inclined, its

³¹ Eliade, *Shamanism...*, p.154.

³² Eliade, 'La țigănci', *Secretul ...*, vol. II, p.182.

³³ Eliade, *În Curte ...*, p.509.

position suggesting the communication that takes place between the two worlds: the sacred and the profane.

The symbolism of the mirror takes on unique connotations in the short story 'A General's Uniforms'. As in other writings, the looking glass shows another world with the difference that this could be either an astral world or the Earth in the archaic times of Genesis:

... kept in the darkness for many years, the mirror's waters are no longer what they used to be. Little by little they lose their transparency and all sorts of shapes, indifferent colours, start to appear in the back of the looking glass. Some of these forms have a rare beauty, as if they are not from this world... While others seem more bizarre, they are similar to the mountain caves or to the rocks from the bottom of the sea, or to a volcano's opening after eruption...³⁴

(... ținute în întuneric de atâția ani apele oglinzii nu mai sunt ce-au fost. Treptat, treptat își pierd transparența, și tot felul de forme ciudate, în diferite culori, încep să apară în fundul oglinzii. Unele din aceste forme sunt de o rară frumusețe, de parcă n-ar fi de pe lumea asta... În timp ce altele par mai stranii, seamănă cu peșterile de munte, sau cu rocile din fundul mării, sau cu vreo gură de vulcan după erupție...)

Ieronim, the child who dances with archaic movements in the mirror of the She-General, accomplishes in fact a ritual of the world's re-enactment in the same way that Śiva, the Indian god, created the Earth through play and dance.

Similar to the water (with its regenerating stages: rain, snow), the mirror delimits, in Eliade's literary writings, a sacred space in which the miraculous can be revealed without its 'camouflage'. The situation is somehow paradoxical, because the water and the mirror alike multiply. But with Eliade this multiplicity acquires a philosophical meaning reminiscent of Plato. Instead of reproducing the profane world, the mirror 'reflects' its representations imperfectly, or rather changes them

³⁴Eliade, 'Uniforme de General', In Curte..., p.441.

into transcendent ones. That is why it could be said that in Mircea Eliade's fiction waters do not accomplish their 'replica-function' and the mirrors in fact, are no longer mirrors, but sacred centres.

ISLAND

Motto: The view is stirring, the Ganges's green waters suddenly opening themselves as in an emerald lake, an island with jungle vegetation in its middle, and with the side of a rocky hill on the left-hand side, from which the Ganges descends from glaciers.

(Mircea Eliade, India, p.140)

The image of the island, although rarely used by Eliade in his fiction (it appears in an extensive way only in the novella 'The Snake'), is one of the symbols mostly analysed by the historian of religions in his scholarly studies. The main signification of the island could be classified under three headings: **1) transcendent / mythical realm; 2) creation and death; 3) woman.** As Eliade noticed, 'the island participates in a mythical geography, not a real one'³⁵. Analysing a short story by Mihai Eminescu³⁶ called 'The Island of Euthanasius', Mircea Eliade compares this island with a mythical one, Śvetadvipa from the Buddhist tradition. (We do not repeat here the parallel made by the historian of religions, as our aim is to highlight only the sacred character of the island.) Śvetadvipa, being a spiritual place, could not be reached except through a magic flight, undertaken by the initiates (Yogis and Hindu hermits).³⁷ Territory isolated by waters but in a direct connection with the sky and cosmos, Śvetadvipa triggers the process of return in time, to the primordial beginnings, and, through this, it becomes a 'centre' of final liberation. The role ascribed to the island as a transcendent/mythical

³⁵Mircea Eliade, Despre Eminescu și Hasdeu (Iasi, Ed. Junimea, 1987), p.14.

³⁶Mihai Eminescu, the Romanian national poet, had also written short stories of a fantastic type.

³⁷Eliade, Despre Eminescu..., p.18.

territory is recurrent in other Eliadean analyses. He notices, for example, that in the Guarani tribe 'the original myth of Paradise did not mention anything else but a kind of Island of the Happy ones, in the middle of the ocean, where death was not known'³⁸. Consequently the aboriginal people were seeking the fabulous island, in order to acquire immortality and live in a spiritual communion with their gods. In his novella 'The Snake', Eliade employs the symbol of a primordial island to suggest another zone of being, a mythical place freed of taboos and one which could only be entered by certain characters:

It was as if she was preparing for a great transformation and unknown forces were flowing inside her, announcing to her the transition into another realm. Dorina jumped from her boat and started to inspect the edges of the island.³⁹

(Parcă se pregătea de o mare prefacere și tării necunoscute izvorau înlăuntrul ființei, vestindu-i trecerea într-un alt tărâm. Dorina sări din barcă și începu să cerceteze malurile insulei.)

The island of the two lovers, Dorina and Andronic, is a fallen Paradise, cut from the sky and fallen into waters, a luxuriant round, sacred space where the consciousness of death does not exist. A biblical interpretation, applied to Eliade's text, hints at the idea of a 'second birth' - through a Fall - of the primordial couple, while the island preserves Eden's magic qualities. In the novella 'The Snake', Dorina, once inside the island's sacred space, suffers a process of inner transformation, in accordance to the place's supernaturalness:

³⁸Mircea Eliade, *Nostalgia Originilor* (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1994), p. 170.

³⁹Eliade, 'Sarpele' *Domnișoara...*, vol. I, pp.231-32.

With every step she was making, it seemed that that unknown fortitude was growing more powerful in the mysteries of her being, a fortitude that was blossoming in her flesh and blood, changing her breath, rhythm, mind. *Everything* could have happened then. Golden, magic birds could have detached from those sleeping branches and called her name. Trees' trunks... could have come alive, transforming themselves into giants and dragons. ... Nothing would have scared her; no encounter, no miracle.⁴⁰

(Cu fiecare pas pe care îl făcea în jurul insulei, parcă și mai puternic creștea în tainele ființei ei tăria aceea neștiută, care îi înflorește carnea și sângele, schimbându-i răsufletul, ritmul, mintea. *Totul* se putea întâmpla acum. Păseri de aur, măiestre, s-ar fi putut desprinde din ramurile acelea adormite și ar fi putut-o chema pe nume. Trunchiurile de copaci... s-ar fi putut însufleși prefăcându-se în uriași și zmei. ... Nimic n-ar fi speriat-o: nici o întâlnire, nici un miracol.)

Apart from **transcendent/mythical space**, the island symbolizes best the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*, as it is the territory *par excellence* where Creation and Death are organically intertwined. Exemplary for Creation and 'similar to the lotus from the Asiatic iconographies, the island implies "firm establishment", the centre around which the whole world was created' ('ca lotusul din iconografiile asiatice, insula implică "stabilire fermă", centrul în jurul căruia s-a creat lumea întreagă.')

⁴¹ The **funerary signification** of the island could also be encountered in many traditions. Eliade had written⁴² about heroes like Peleus, Cadmus, Achilles, who were 'living' on such abstract, ideal islands, as a reward for their deeds, performed during their lives in the profane realm. The same significations - **Creation/Death** - acquires the island in Eliade's novella 'The Snake'. In order to reach it, Dorina has to undergo an initiatory death, while Andronic changes his condition (a symbolic death), from man into serpent, once every sunrise.

Apart from the meanings we highlighted before, the island is strongly linked to the **woman's archetype**. Jones asserted that the island is

⁴⁰ibid., p.232.

⁴¹Eliade, *Despre Eminescu...*, p.18.

⁴²ibid., p.14.

'the mythical image of woman, virgin, mother', while Badouin noted that the vocation of the insular exile was nothing but 'a complex of seclusion, synonymous with a return to the mother'.⁴³ Also the circularity of the island, charged with the symbolism of vegetation and water, suggests feminine, maternal valences.

Commenting on Eminescu's short story, Eliade pinpoints the central role of the island, which 'solves the characters' drama'⁴⁴ by enhancing any potentiality. The researcher stresses the fact that the short story's male character, Ieronim, falls for Cezara only after he contemplates her naked on the island. Moreover, Eliade himself exploits this theme in his novella 'The Snake', which bears striking similarities with Eminescu's 'The Island of Euthanasius' (they even have common elements like: magical nudity, solitude, luxuriant island, etc.). The island, as a symbol of femininity enhances Dorina's charms in the eyes of the hero Andronic. In her turn, Dorina is enchanted by the island:

She didn't feel anything but a strange, dizzying and unclear happiness, which she didn't try to understand; as if the smooth passage from dream into a real island, invaded by grass and unknown trees, suddenly was opening up to her a new way, Godlike, in which she could walk with her womanly feet.⁴⁵

(Nu simțea decât o stranie, amețitoare și nelămurită bucurie, pe care nu încerca să o pătrundă; parcă trecerea lină din vis într-o insulă aievea, copleșită de ierburi și de copaci necunoscuți, îi deschidea dintr-odată o cale nouă, dumnezeiască, pe care o putea de acum bate cu piciorul ei de femeie.)

Clearly in 'The Snake' the island's magic supposes, amongst other significations, certain erotic connotations. As a matter of fact, it should be noticed that the three major meanings of the island's symbolism, **transcendecy / mythical place**, **Creation / Death**, **woman** merged

⁴³Quoted by Durand, *Structurile...*, p.297.

⁴⁴Eliade, *Despre Eminescu...*, p.14.

⁴⁵ibid., p.232.

in Mircea Eliade's fantastic story 'The Snake', enriching both its conscious and subliminal texture.

CAVE

Motto: ... Dieu (=l'Esprit) est enterré en nous comme dans une grotte; il n'est pas mort, mais caché seulement là-bas quelque part. Brahman, dit *Katha Upanishad* (v.6), est *giyam*, 'caché'. Cela veut dire que l'Esprit est semblable à 'l'habitant d'une grotte'. Le coeur - où les Upanishads situent la présence du *atman* - est une 'grotte'.

(Mircea Eliade, Fragments d'un journal, p.314)

In order to understand the role played by **the cave** and its '**substitutes**' (**cellar, ruins, garret, air-raid shelter, solstice**) in Mircea Eliade's fiction, we have to examine the essential meanings of this symbol. First of all the cavern represents a concrete indicative of **passage into another world**. But more than this the grotto connotes the **image of the world**, as 'the cave must form a complete whole and contain in itself the representation of heaven as well as of the earth'⁴⁶, while the final exit from the initiatory cave is considered by Guénon⁴⁷ 'an exit from Cosmos'.

As a place governed by the rule of *coincidentia oppositorum*, the cavern's symbolism unites Heaven and Earth, Fright and Delight, Light and Darkness. Eliade called it a 'total space'⁴⁸ and it is evident that in the image of the cave all three vital initiatory levels are merged: **obstetric, erotic, eschatological**. All of these levels correspond to certain symbols conveyed by the grotto: **obstetric** - Magna Mater / universal Matrix, egg, chrysalis; **erotic** - heart; **eschatological** - the unconscious.

⁴⁶Guénon, Fundamental Symbols..., p.141.

⁴⁷ibid., p.156.

⁴⁸Mircea Eliade, De la Zalmoxis la Genghis-Han (Bucharest, Ed. științifică și enciclopedică, 1980), p.45.

A scene of initiation in prehistory, the cavern was assimilated to a labyrinth or ritually transformed into a labyrinth.⁴⁹ This labyrinth is, in our opinion, not only horizontal, but vertical as well, as all three levels we mentioned before suppose initiatory trials and a certain ritual orientation ('geography'). We can also talk about a 'temporal' maze, not in the sense of a profane duration (which is abolished), but in the sense of a sacred organisation of the rites of passage: birth - marriage - death.

The symbolic **(1) obstetric level** is moulded on the likeness of Mother Earth, which is compared to the body of a giant woman. Eliade stressed the fact that entering a labyrinth or a cavern was equivalent to a mystical return to the Mother: 'Evidently, if the mines' galleries and the mouths of the rivers were assimilated to the *vagina* of Mother-Earth, the same symbolism is applicable *a fortiori* to grottos and caverns'⁵⁰. The correspondence Cave - Mother explains the dialectic of certain cave symbols, like the egg and chrysalis. The **(2) erotic level** is acknowledged by the celebration of specific **mythological weddings** in caverns⁵¹ and also, as Guénon pointed out, by the symbolism of the cave, which is closely related to the one of the **heart**.⁵² The grotto is a sacred territory where the funereal rites are performed, this making evident the **(3) eschatological level** of its symbolism. Besides, the initiatory 'death' to the profane world followed by the 'descent into Hell' was compared⁵³ to the journey in the subterranean world to which the cave allows access. The adjoining symbol of the 'eschatological cave' is - from an analytical psychology point of view - the unconscious. As

⁴⁹Eliade, Mituri, vise și mistere in Eseuri..., p.259.

⁵⁰ibid., pp. 259, 260.

⁵¹ibid., p.260.

⁵²Guénon, Fundamental Symbols..., p.141.

⁵³ibid., p.140.

Carl Gustav Jung suggested: 'The cave represents the darkness and seclusion of the unconscious;...' ⁵⁴. But the typical initiatory cave is illuminated from within as it is the space of a 'second birth' and thus equivalent to illumination. The grotto is a sacred space *par excellence*, where initiation could be translated into wisdom, oracular dreams and exorcistic powers, and specific revelations. This belief is widespread from the Eskimo population to the North American shamans or Greek heroes. Thus, among the Smith Sound Eskimo, the aspirant must walk at night straight into a cave, in order to prove that he is 'chosen' by the spirits to become a shaman, while the North American novices have to dream about their helping spirits in caves. ⁵⁵ Mircea Eliade also quoted the legend of Epimenides of Crete, who 'slept' for a long time in Zeus's cave on mount Ida, and, when he left the cavern, was a master of 'enthusiastic wisdom' (the technique of ecstasy). ⁵⁶ There is one more essential aspect that should be considered when tackling the complex symbolism of the cave and this is its transcendent value as cosmic 'cave', having two 'zodiacal' gates that correspond to the two solstitial points. Guénon ⁵⁷ considers one of these points an entry ('gate of men'), and the other exit ('gate of gods')

All the aspects we discussed so far concerning the symbolism of the cave are present in a more or less evident way in Eliade's fiction. In his novella 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats', the initiatory cavern which gathers all the attributes of a transcendent realm appears in a dream of the heroine Oana. She describes the oneiric cave to her friends:

⁵⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, Dreams (London, Ark Paperbacks, 1991), p.227.

⁵⁵ Eliade, Shamanism..., pp. 51, 52.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.389.

⁵⁷ Guénon, Fundamental Symbols..., pp.158, 159, 160.

... I suddenly penetrated under the earth and I reached a cave without end, shiny, with its walls covered in precious stones and lit by thousands of candles. And a priest... whispered: 'It's Easter, that's why they lit so many candles'. But I heard a voice from the unseen saying at the same time: 'Around here there is no Easter, because in this realm we are still in the Old Testament !'⁵⁸

(... m-am pomenit deodată că pătrund sub pământ și ajung într-o peșteră fără sfârșit, sclipitoare, cu pereți bătuți în pietre scumpe și luminată de mii de lumânări. Și un preot... a șoptit: 'E Paștele, de aceea au aprins atâtea lumânări'. Dar eu am auzit în acea clipă un glas din nevăzut: 'Pe-aici nu e Paște, pentru că pe tărâmul acesta suntem încă în Vechiul Testament !')

The precious stones covering the walls of the cave and the thousands of candles are symbolizing 'illumination', the initiatory quality of the sacred space where time is in fact the mythical no-time. The cavern from Oana's dream is otherwise strikingly similar to an initiatory dream of a Samoyed Shaman that Eliade recorded in his book on shamanism: 'He saw an opening before him and entered a bright cave, covered with mirrors, in the middle of which there was something like a fire.'⁵⁹ Another hero of Eliade's novella, Lixandru, searches for the cave he saw only once and could not find again because an entrance to another realm is always difficult to reach: 'I can't see it anymore ! It was like a very big light... . It was like a diamond cave, ... and lit as if a thousand torches were burning...' ('N-o mai găsesc ! Era ca o lumină mare de tot... . Era ca o peșteră de diamant..., și luminată de parcă ardeau o mie de făclii... ')⁶⁰. As a matter of fact, the theme of the bright grotto is widely attested (e.g. Christian legends about the lit cavern from Bethlehem, the legend of the twelve 'Wise Kings' from the Zugnîn Chronicle, where there appears a Cave of Treasures invaded by a supernatural light).⁶¹

⁵⁸Eliade, 'Pe Strada Mântuleasa', *In Curte...*, p.283.

⁵⁹Eliade, *Shamanism...*, p.41.

⁶⁰Eliade, 'Pe Strada Mântuleasa', *In Curte...*, p.223.

⁶¹Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis...*, pp.44, 45.

In the story 'Youth without Youth' the image of the grotto signifies a sacred, secluded place for meditation, where the heroine, Veronica Bühler, pretended to have lived in a previous life, as a Yogi called Rupini. But the most important aspect that the symbolism of the cave takes in Eliade's fiction is its development into what we called '**profane substitutes**': **cellar, ruins, garret, air-raid shelter**. This process is in line with his scientific works' ideas, according to which the sacred must be camouflaged in the profane, in order to be paradoxically made accessible and inaccessible at the same time (accessible = the sacred enters the language and understanding of modern society; inaccessible = the sacred can no longer be differentiated from the profane by the non-initiates). Eliade ascribes to these 'profane substitutes' the same mythical features as to the cave: threshold facilitating the entry into another realm and another mode of existence; initiatory place triggering illumination and absolute freedom.

The cellar appears in some of the major Eliadean literary writings ('The Old Man and the Bureaucrats', 'The Snake', 'Miss Christina', The Forbidden Forest) and its essence is the same in all of them: magic centre where all **three cosmic levels** (underworld - world - supraworld) and **three initiatory labyrinths** (obstetric - erotic - eschatological) are superimposed. Thus - analogous to the cave - **the cellar** acquires the attributes of the totality of the world. Some of the young characters from 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats' are in search of a special cellar, a magic place from where the passage into another realm could be realised. In the novella 'The Snake', a monastic cellar constitutes the epiphanic nucleus of certain Mysteries, an initiation led by Andronic, who tells to the monks and his companions, in the light of the candles, legends linked to that place. Egor from 'Miss Christina' also performs some exorcistic rites in a cellar, where the remains of the

vampire Christina are, and he experiences in the same spot a masochistic erotic experience with a little girl, Simina. In this cellar all three initiatory levels are merged: obstetric (the vampire Christina comes to life every night in here); erotic (the adventure with Simina); eschatological (here is the soul of Christina that Egor symbolically 'kills' with an iron bar). In the novel The Forbidden Forest, the hero Ștefan Viziru, obsessed by myths and their 'camouflaged' condition, intuitively that Ileana, the woman he loves, is a sort of 'messenger' who could reveal to him the way towards transcendence. This is the reason for which he asks her - with no apparent connection - if she had an old cellar at the country house where she used to live: '... she was talking to him about Zinca's estate, and he interrupted her with a guilty smile: "Do you have an old, deep cellar, at Zinca ?..." ' ('... ea îi vorbea despre moșia de la Zinca, și el a întrerupt-o, cu un zâmbet vinovat: "Aveți o pivniță veche, adâncă, la Zinca ?..." ')⁶².

The ruins take the meaning of the cave in Eliade's novel Nineteen Roses. There the ruins amongst which the team of Ieronim Thanase's actors play archaic scenarios suggest a magic grotto to the character Eusebiu Damian. In here the space is elastic, the time disappears and the identification of the ruins with a cavern signifies not only a return to the origins, to the myths, but the transition from a profane to a sacred world, from a world-jail to complete 'freedom':

It could have been said I was entering a cave whose walls I felt sometimes near us, to our right and left, other times quite far, and whose vault was rising the more we advanced.⁶³

(S-ar fi spus că pătrundeam într-o peșteră ai cărei pereți îi ghiceam când aproape de noi, în dreapta și în stânga noastră, când destul de departe, și a cărei boltă se înălța cu cât înaintam.)

⁶²Eliade, Noaptea... vol. I (1991), p.48.

⁶³Eliade, Nouăsprezece..., p.65.

These ruins are clearly the image of the cosmic 'cave', unlimited and changing constantly.

Another 'profane substitute' of the cavern is **the garret** from 'A General's Uniforms'. The garret in the story is closer than any other 'substitute' to the idea of labyrinth. There initiation takes place mainly through the emblematic significations of some old costumes preserved in big coffers. the two youngsters searching the trunks discover in fact, the transcendency of the world (symbolized by the collection of butterflies) and its camouflage (symbolized by the uniforms of General). They are initiated into myths (by the discovery of the traditional, peasant costumes) and the mysteries of love (the wedding dress that once unfolded cannot be pressed back into its place) and death and resurrection (the green dress with black-laced collar made for the daughter of the She-General who died in a bombardment).

In 'Twelve Thousand Head of Cattle' the eschatological place of initiation equivalent the cave is represented by an **air-raid shelter**. The character Iancu Gore assisted, without realizing, to the last moments of a group of people who had died in a blitz. By entering the shelter, he breaks in fact into another realm, with a different time and rules (e.g. no one seems to notice his presence).

The transcendent value of the **cosmic 'cave'** with the two gates corresponding to the **summer solstice and winter solstice** is fully exploited by Eliade in The Forbidden Forest and 'Dayan'. René Guénon noticed that in the annual cycle the solstice of winter and summer are two points that correspond respectively to North and South in the spatial order:

The solstices are truly what may be called the poles of the year, and these poles of the temporal world... take place..., in virtue of a correspondence that is real and in no way arbitrary, of the poles of the spatial world.⁶⁴

This interpretation sheds a new light upon Eliade's novel The Forbidden Forest. The hero Ștefan encounters Ileana in the very night when the summer solstice begins and this corresponds to the 'gate of men'. Thus the magic forest where the two meet acquires initiatory values that lead towards illumination in the end, when both lovers leave the profane level through the 'gate of gods' (again, in a forest and during the summer solstice). Although the forest is different (on other geographical co-ordinates) and their encounter happens twelve years later, the spatial and temporal axis formed by the solstices annuls the profane differences, preserving only the transcendent quality which is immutable. In the novella 'Dayan' the approach of the solstice foretells the chance of the character to enter another realm of complete freedom, devoid of space or time.

It can be said that the symbol of the cave in its proper or figurative sense not only enriched Eliade's literary writings, but the historian of religions succeeded in adding new dimensions to the cave's symbolism by his creation of 'profane substitutes'.

⁶⁴Guénon, Fundamental Symbols..., p.158.

THE SERPENT

Motto: When we'll all be in Paradise, in the shadow of a lily, I will understand what this lizard tells me now...

(Mircea Eliade, La Umbra unui Crin, p.126)

Considered 'one of the most important symbols of the human imagination'¹, **the serpent** received diverse interpretations, both for its features (its ability to change its skin, to hypnotize, to be, at the same time, poisonous and healing, and so on) and for the role it plays in religious ceremonies: fecundating god, representative of time or master of ill-fated temptation. The serpent is the central symbol in one of Eliade's novellas and, in order to value the 'mythical fabric' of this particular writing, it is necessary to highlight some of the snake's connotations. As in the case of other essential symbols, the richness of meanings of this symbol hints at **completeness**. The signification of the serpent could be divided into three main groups, each being able to be framed under certain emblems: **1) Chronos**; **2) Eros** and **3) Ancestral perennality** (e.g. links with transcendency and the guardian of the final mystery: death). The first category, under the sign of **Chronos**, lumps together all the temporal connotations of the serpent. The reptile has links with the sun and moon (planets ruling the temporal law), represents the high tide and low tide and - under its ouroboros (symbol depicting a snake swallowing its tail) form - becomes a **cyclical symbol** directly related to the **zodiacal wheel** and **metempsychosis**.

¹Durand, Structurile..., p.393.

In his book The Myth of the Reintegration, Eliade uses certain ancient Indic texts in order to prove the identity serpent=sun (e.g. he quotes a text, *Pancavimsa Brâhmana*, in which it is directly specified that 'the serpents are suns')². The bond between the serpent and the moon is even clearer, as the serpent is a lunar animal. Gilbert Durand pointed out that there are many legends that make a lunar animal the first husband of all women and that sometimes it is precisely the serpent who mates with them³. Also similar to the moon which governs the secret of immortality (it dies to rise again), the serpent changes its skin and consequently undergoes a symbolic revival. As a representative of the moon, the serpent was believed to appear and disappear in the same rhythm as the planet and to have the same number of rings as the number of days in a lunar cycle.⁴ Also the idea of moon's appearance (its light) is represented in iconography under the form of a serpent swallowing a hare.⁵

But the most important aspect that relates the ophidian symbolism to the idea of time is the serpent's capacity to abolish duration through regeneration. In many traditions the serpent embodies the concept of victory over death, not only by his capacities of entering the earth (=underworld), or by changing its skin (like the seed)⁶, but by governing the secret of immortality as well. This last feature explains its affiliation to the symbolism of vegetation. Besides, the cyclic shape of the ouroboros implies the 'eternal return' of time and thus implies the idea

²Mircea Eliade, Mitul reintegrării (Bucharest, Ed. Vremea, 1942), p.349.

³Durand, Structurile..., p.126.

⁴ibid., p.394.

⁵Mircea Eliade, Antologie de filosofie românească, vol. V (Bucharest, Ed. Minerva, 1988), p.161.

⁶Durand, Structurile..., p.84.

of mythical time that is equivalent (from a profane perspective) with no-time.

The second category of significations, under the sign of **Eros**, highlights the ambivalent status of the serpent as uniting the contraries male/female. Concerning the feminoid characters, Eliade demonstrated the strong bond between serpent - femininity - fecundity and considered the ouroboros the symbol of the egg or vulva.⁷ Along with these **feminine traits**, the **male phalloid signification** of the serpent remains evident. According to Gilbert Durand the serpent replaces the phallus in the palaeo-Oriental and Mediterranean cultures, the researcher quoting in support of this theory the capacity of Priapus to be ophidiform or the mystic union with the serpent that was performed in the Eleusian Mysteries and the Mysteries of the Great Mother.⁸ Both the feminoid and the masculinoid features of the serpent are very strong, each in its own right, and this hints more at a yin-yang type of balance rather than an androgynous state where both traits should be sublimated.

The third category, under the sign of **ancestral perennality** invests the serpent with three main attributes: initiator, liberator, obstacle. From the biblical interpretations which attributed to the serpent the role of **initiator in a cycle of mysteries** and up until its association with the forces of **thanatos**, underworld or his **medical / pharmaceutical** virtues, the serpent was always linked to **transcendancy**, with the great secrets of **nature and universe**. The initiatory role of the serpent stands for particular beliefs in its magic powers: 'Anybody who eats the serpent acquires the force of

⁷Mircea Eliade, Traité d'Histoire des Religions (Paris, Payot, 1990), p.151.

⁸Durand, Structurale..., p.397.

clear-sightedness; the serpent is at the origin of many magic powers for Chinese people, for the Hebrews and Arabs.⁹ The serpent is also a participant in cosmogony. In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the god Atum was supposed to retake his ophidian form when the world returns to Chaos, because Atum is 'the supreme and hidden God'¹⁰, while in Indian mythology the great monster Vrtra has the shape of a serpent from whose splittings the Cosmos appears¹¹. The snake is also linked to the cosmic, primordial waters.

Apart from being an initiator (in death or immortality, in the crucial existential mysteries) the image of the snake is conjugated - in the conception of certain Gnostic sects - with the attribute of liberator. According to them, the biblical serpent revealed to the primeval pair their condition of God's slaves. But the serpent could also become an obstacle in man's way towards something superior. According to numerous myths a lunar animal cheats the first man, changing the immortality of the primordial man into fault and fall.¹² One example in the same line is the Gilgamesh Epic, where the snake steals the plant of immortality from the King. Victor Kernbach attributed to serpent the status of man's rival. In his opinion the second tree from the Garden of Eden, whose fruit, if eaten, triggers the Fall, is not the Tree of Knowledge, but of Death.¹³ In our opinion though, knowledge is nothing else in this context but death-awareness.¹⁴ Apart from the


⁹ibid., p.398.

¹⁰Mircea Eliade, Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase, vol. II (Bucharest, Ed. Științifică și enciclopedică, 1981), p.91.

¹¹Eliade, Mitul reintegrării..., p.46.

¹²Victor Kernbach, Biserica în involuție (Bucharest, Ed. Politica, 1984), p.140.

¹³ibid., p.140.

¹⁴In the Bible God acknowledges the mortality of Adam (I.3.22): 'And God went on to say: "Here the man has become like one of us in knowing good and bad, and now in order that he may not put his hand out and actually take [fruit] also from the tree of life and eat and live to time indefinite"'.


connotations we mentioned before, the snake could take the identity of the mystic ancestor and also represent meteorological light and natural force in general.

In his literary writings Mircea Eliade used the three main emblematic characteristic of the symbol: 1) **Chronos**, 2) **Eros** and 3) **ancestral perennality**. The novel The Light Dying Away is exemplary for the temporal qualities of the serpent's symbolism. The main hero, Cesare, had his eyes operated on and the first image he sees when his bandages are taken off after darkness is 'a strange tapestry of thick serpents, woven one into another and moving their rings'¹⁵. Moreover the chapter is entitled 'Chapter with Serpents', highlighting the 'fall' of Cesare and his new spiritual birth. The erotic attributes of the snake are used by Eliade when describing the hair of some of his heroines (e.g. Maitreyi, Niculina from Nineteen Roses), in order to suggest their femininity. Also, the engagement ring that Maitreyi offers to her lover, Allan, conveys an erotic message:

I've chosen the stone for your ring, Maitreyi told me, while untying from her sari's corner a green-black gem, in the shape of a viper splashed with a brightly red hue on its head.

She started to explain the ring to me. It will be crafted according to the Indian wedding ceremonial - from iron and gold - like two intertwined serpents, one dark and one yellow, the first one representing virility, the other one femininity.¹⁶

(Ți-am ales piatra pentru inel, îmi spune Maitreyi, dezlegând din colțul sari-ei o nestemată verde-neagră în forma unui cap de șopărlă străbătută în creștet de o geană sângerie.

Incepu să-mi explice inelul. Va fi lucrat după ceremonialul căsătoriei indiene - din fier și aur - ca doi șerpi încolăciți, unul întunecat și altul galben, cel dintâi reprezentând virilitatea, celălalt feminitatea.)

¹⁵Eliade, Lumina..., (1931), p.39.

¹⁶Eliade, Maitreyi..., p.105.

Cobra's hypnotic powers are detailed in a travel book, India, in which Eliade recalls an episode in the jungle.¹⁷ The relationship man-snake, under the sign of a paradisiacal nostalgia, is evidenced in the novel The Forbidden Forest and the last Eliadean short story, titled 'In the Shadow of a Lily'. The hope in a return to the *beginnings* is directly associated with a virtual rehabilitation of the primordial harmony, when man was still able to communicate with serpents. The author's message is explicit: by trying to understand his bond with animals, man 'will start to wake up and marvel at the splendours of his own existence' ('va începe să se trezească și se va minuna de splendorile propriei lui existențe')¹⁸.

In The Forbidden Forest the hero Ștefan is obsessed by the paradisiacal condition that enabled man to understand other creatures: 'I once read a book, ... a book with a young man who was calling the serpents and was talking to them. I am sure that these things are possible.' ('Am citit odată o carte, ... o carte cu un tânăr care chema șerpilor și stătea de vorbă cu ei. Sunt sigur că lucrurile acestea sunt cu putință.')

For Eliade the serpents are not only representatives of a paradisiacal syndrome, they are also messengers from beyond, knowledgeable about eschatological secrets. The most complex symbolism of the reptile is to be encountered in Eliade's early novella 'The Snake'. The significances of the serpent could be framed in the big series moon -

¹⁷'A gigantic cobra fixed its looks of a blue steel upon the eyes of a dove... The bird cried that night-call that stirred us, but couldn't fly. The cobra was streaming down its fascination through the same gaze of telluric spirit, waiting. But my companion... shot the cobra.'

We both approached the wild dove. It was dead as well, of fright...'.
Mircea Eliade, India (Bucharest, Ed. Cugetarea, 1934), p.176.

¹⁸Eliade, 'La Umbra unui Crin', Nuvele..., p.137.

¹⁹Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. I, p.8.

dance - magic- myth - sorcery, and, in this writing, the author merged all its three essential attributes: **1) representative of eros and phallic symbol; 2) messenger of thanatos; 3) temporal symbol**. The central episode of the story describes the apparition of a snake and the magic ritual undergone by Andronic to make him leave without harming anybody present. The serpent's movements trigger a flow of powerful **sensuality** that catches one of the female characters in a net of oneirico-erotic visions:

It was as if the closeness of the serpent was draining her breath, dispersing her blood from the veins, melting all her flesh in a terror blended with an unknown thrill, of cursed love. It was a strange mixture of death and erotic respiration in that hideous undulation, in the cold light of the reptile.²⁰

(Apropierea șarpelui îi scurgea parcă răsuflarea risipindu-i sângele din vene, topindu-i carnea întreagă într-o groază împletită cu fiori necunoscuți, de dragoste bolnavă. Era un amestec straniu de moarte și respirație erotică în legănarea aceea hidoasă, în lumina rece a reptilei.)

The other female characters as well have intense visions alternating between fright, fascination and voluptuousness. Liza is fascinated by the masculine play of the serpent, 'as if that arrow of unnatural flesh would have penetrated her too deep' ('parcă ar fi pătruns-o pe ea prea adânc săgeata aceea de carne nefirească.')

²¹ Even the not so young Mrs Zamfirescu feels an erotic upsurge, conjoining horror and irresistible attraction, in a typical fantasy: 'Does she really want the serpent to approach her, feel it climbing up on her breasts, descending boldly, with its new and terrible sliding ?!' ('Să se apropie șarpele, să-l simtă urcându-i-se pe sâni, coborând îndrăzneț, cu lunecarea lui nouă și îngrozitoare ?!')²² It is evident that in this novella the serpent is

²⁰Eliade, 'Șarpele', *Domnișoara...*, vol. I, pp.196-97.

²¹ibid., p.197.

²²ibid., p. 199.

primarily employed as an erotic symbol, the love spell that heads the writing being an additional reason to consider this interpretation first. But the snake also represents the forces of thanatos, and in the story the heroine, Dorina, traverses - in a dream - a river with mortuary connotations in order to reach Andronic - the King of serpents. In the plot of the novella an ambiguous atmosphere, of suspension between eros and thanatos, between the material and transcendental planes, is all pervading. And finally, the temporal symbolism of the reptile is highlighted by the magical game in the woods, during which all the protagonists have supernatural visions. Vladimir, one of the characters, has a mythico-temporal vision that fits perfectly the lunar and temporal character of the ophidian:

A phosphorescent dial, which became bigger and bigger, until it blinded him with its green lights, lunar; and, in the middle, the serpent. ... Imperceptibly the arrow of the clock had started to grow, enlivened, until Vladimir saw, frightened, the serpent's rings appearing, he saw how they glittered and thrilled under that phosphorescent light.²³

(Un cadran de ceas fosforescent, care se făcea tot mai mare și tot mai mare, până ce-l orbi cu luminile lui verzi, lunare; și, în mijloc, șarpele. ... Pe nesimțite, limba ceasului începuse să crească, înviorată, până ce Vladimir zări înspăimântat cum mijesc inelele șarpelui, cum sclipesc și se înfioară ele sub lumina aceea fosforescentă.)

As it can be noticed, the image of the serpent - with its symbolism endowed with multiple valences - constantly appeared in Eliade's fiction. From the statuary representations of serpents all over the world, the allegorical images of the Egyptians (where the sky is considered a pair of open wings) or the image of the Great Serpent, *Sarparâja* from India, up until the connotations of the fourth guardian angel from the Korean

²³ibid., p.200.

frescoes²⁴ the ophidian symbol traversed the epochs and meridians as part of the archetypal heritage of the world. It is a consequence of this interpretative richness that made a researcher in the study of religions like Eliade to render this symbol valuable in his fiction.

²⁴Bang, Hwan Djou, La culture nationale de la Corée (Pyongyang, Korea, 1988), p.27.

THE BULL

Both **the bull** and **the serpent** are part of the same archetypal series and consequently their symbolism shares the main connotations: **1) Chronos**, **2) Eros** and **3) Ancestral perennality**. Similar to the serpent, the image of the bull could be found spread all over the world, playing a central role in many traditions. In Egypt, for example, the taurus was sacred, and the Egyptians believed that people were born of animals of other species', while also supporting the idea that gods were embodied in certain animals, like the bull²⁵. In the Iranian tradition the god Verethragna used to appear in front of Zarathustra under different aspects, 'sometimes under the form of a horse, other times under the one of a taurus...'²⁶ In other parts of the world, like Numibia, the development of the bovines' tradition is remarkable, and bull heads were discovered on some tombs²⁷, suggesting some kind of funerary ritual. Also the Kafirs (a population living in Afganistan and on the other side of its border with Pakistan) used to venerate the bull as a singular deity.²⁸ Archaeology has produced a lot of data related to the image of the bull. We need only call the discoveries of Mojenjo-Daro and Harappa (e.g. seals with engravings representing human masks with horns, and a bull's body, hoofs and tail)²⁹ and those at Knossos (e.g. *The Great Sacred Horns* made out of porous stone, a rhyton - libation vessel - called *Bull Head*, and a fresco entitled *Tauromakhia* depicting the

²⁵Constantin Daniel, Cultura spirituală a Egiptului Antic (Bucharest, Ed. Cartea Românească, 1985), p.456.

²⁶Durand, Structurile..., p.100.

²⁷Constantin Daniel, Pe urmele vechilor civilizații (Bucharest, Ed. Sport-Turism, 1987), p.15.

²⁸ibid., p.125.

²⁹ibid., p124.

favourite game of the Minoans: acrobatic exercises with a religious signification)³⁰. Given the vast area in which **the bull** was part of the religious and ritual life of diverse populations, it is no surprise that its symbolism is very complex. As with the symbolism of the serpent, we have grouped its meanings under the three main headings that seem to us essential: **1) Chronos, 2) Eros, 3) Ancestral perennality**.

The bull's capacity of being in turn or concomitantly **lunar** or / and **solar**, its **cyclical symbol** as a representative of the **zodiacal wheel** and the strong interrelationship between **taurus** and **pharmacopoeia** are all characteristics that situate the symbolism of the bovine under the sign of Chronos. One example of the **lunar** or **solar** symbolism of the animal is the *Mysteries of Mithra*, where the sacrifice of the bull takes place in a cosmic cave, in the presence of the Sun and Moon. Inscribed on the *coincidentia oppositorum* line of significations, the taurus, as Gilbert Durand noticed, takes part in the great scheme of lunar androgyny: 'If primarily the bull is chthonian..., it is, without distinction, solar or lunar'³¹. The French anthropologist also highlighted the unity of the contraries present in the symbolism of the lunar, female deities with a bull's head, who bear the sun between their horns (symbols of the moon's horn)³². The symbolism of the taurus bears a **cyclical connotation** as the animal is the absolute **master of time** and of the **zodiacal wheel**. The *Mysteries of Mithra* for example evidentiate this through the **cosmic structure** of the bull's sacrifice, 'indicated by the twelve signs of the zodiac or by the seven planets, by the winds' and the four seasons' symbols'.³³ In the Irano-syncretist ritual the link **taurus -**

³⁰J. M. Christoforakis, *Knossos* (Crete, Greece, 1978), pp.64-65.

³¹Durand, *Structurale...*, p.98.

³²ibid., p.98.

³³Eliade, *Istoria...*, vol. II, p.315.

plats / pharmacopoeia is also exemplified when the neophyte kills the animal to obey the Sun's order. In the description of the ritual is specified that from the bull's body appear 'the good herbs and plants'; from its spinal marrow, the wheat; and from its blood, the vine.³⁴

The symbolism of the taurus also lies under the rule of **Eros**. As Durand remarked, 'in the animal's anatomy the horn, which does not enter into putrefaction and whose long shape is directly suggestive, will symbolise extremely well virile power.'³⁵ An example of the relationship **taurus - Eros** is the cult of Śiva, in which the god - venerated as a phallus - is sometimes represented by the bull Nandi³⁶. Other examples in which the bull replaces - on a symbolic plane - the virility of the neophyte are the cult of Cybele and *The Mysteries of Attis*:

... the neophyte was sanctified with a bull's blood..., taurobolium. Probably the sacrifice was replacing the self-mutilation of the *mystes*, because this one was offering the genital organs of the victim to the goddess. He was admitted into the 'nuptial chamber'... or 'under the baldaquin' as a mystical husband of Cybele...³⁷

As a symbol of **ancestral perennality** the taurus became, at the same time and paradoxically, an **initiatory obstacle** and a **means** towards **transcendancy**. Similar to the serpent that had to be eliminated for immortality to be obtained, the bull was doomed to a ritual sacrifice. Also, among the Arabs for example, the sacred drink from the taurus's marrow and grease could make people deathless³⁸, in the same way that *soma* obtained from the serpent conferred immortality on its

³⁴ibid., p.314.

³⁵Durand, *Structurile...*, p.174.

³⁶Mihai Martis, *De la Bhārata la Gandhi* (Bucharest, Ed. Științifică și enciclopedică, 1987), p.67.

³⁷Eliade, *Istoria...*, vol. II, p.279.

³⁸ibid., p.314.

consumers. But the ancestral perennity of the animal is best evidenced by the connections between **taurus** and **cosmogony** encountered in many traditions, although the bovine can signify the **destructive force at a cosmic level** as well. In the palaeo-Oriental cultures for instance, the bull embodies meteorological and ill-fated force, while the isomorphism between this mammal and waters or thunder is widespread.³⁹ (Durand showed that the Sanskrit term 'ge' means 'taurus', 'earth' and 'noise'.)⁴⁰

The richness of the taurine symbolism stands for its presence in one of the most complex Eliadean novellas: 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'. This writing is made up of various narrative nuclei, each of them containing a mythical episode. The tensional centre of the novella is the episode of a sexual union between Oana - heroine with mythical dimensions - and a taurus (=the primordial bull). The beast accomplishes an initiatory function and its relationship with Oana enters a magico-ritualistic sphere. In this novella, the old teacher Fărâmbă tells the story of the giant girl, Oana, who was 'beautiful like the statue of a goddess'⁴¹, like Venus. The woman is presented wrapped in a mythical aura. She has a magic condition: she bathes naked in rivers when it is full moon; instantly tames the shepherds' dogs; prays at the moon and is able to exorcize the spirit of the Mandrake plant. As in the myth of the Minotaur, a curse appears in the story: Selim (the friend of Oana's father) cursed all the descendants of her father to mate with animals and Oana must live this curse. As a consequence, she is fated to unite with a lunar, Venusian wild bull:

³⁹See example in Durand, Structurile..., p.99.

⁴⁰ibid., p.98.

⁴¹Eliade, 'Pe Strada Mântuleasa', In Curte ..., p.247.

Oana threw off her ragged dress and she was walking naked, day and night. And in the nights when the moon was visible, the taurus was bellowing so that it could be heard across seven valleys, and people awoke frightened, and that's how all of them saw her running naked over the hills, with her hair waving over her shoulders and the bull following her.⁴²

(Oana a zvârlit treanța de rochie de pe ea și umbla goală, zi și noapte. Iar în nopțile cu lună, mugea taurul de se auzea în șapte văi, și se trezeau oamenii înfricoșați, și așa s-a făcut de au văzut-o toți alergând goală peste dealuri, cu părul fâlfâindu-i pe umeri, și cu taurul în urma ei.)

The association of the girl with the bull is not only a re-editing of a primordial sin, but a necessary initiatory trial in order to assimilate the spirit of the nature and the sacred, through a direct and extra human contact. Oana (like Cybele) surpasses this obstacle by a sexual union which, in the last instance, could be equated with **a ritual transfer of magical virtues** (the primordial taurine powers) through *semen virile*. The episode can also correspond to a cosmic re-creation of the world. Because of the ritualistic union with a taurus, Oana enters another condition, achieves a new understanding of the world and immerses perfectly in nature, thus realising the divine state in which the human limitations are dissolved. Consequently the erotic symbolism of the bull is converted into one of transcendency, as Oana's alliance with the taurus means also a victory over time and over the weak human part left in her. In the story's finale, the bull is killed and it can be said that only after accomplishing Selim's curse, Oana becomes a real Goddess, like Cybele the Phrygian (in the cult of Cybele and the *Mysteries of Attis*) who used to receive the sexual organs of a taurus as an oblation.

⁴²ibid., p.252. The underlining is mine.

MYTHS AND MOTIFS

ROMANIAN FOLKLORE -

THE ROMANIA-COMPLEX

Motto: I incessantly think of home... . Everything remained there: my youth, my past, family , friends, and all I have done and I have not done, my papers from adolescence, the manuscripts, my correspondence with so many friends who are no longer living, the books, the files with all my articles from secondary school and University, absolutely everything. Here, in the 'Occident' I am but a fragment.

(Mircea Eliade, Jurnal vol. I, p.243)

To talk about the **Romania-Complex** in Eliade's oeuvre three intertwined aspects should be taken into consideration: **1)** the early **activity as journalist** and the influence of his ideas over his contemporaries, **2)** the penetration of **Romanian folkloric elements** (myths, symbols, beliefs, customs, spells) in his novels, short-stories and articles; and **3)** the **image of his native country** as an element of **Equilibrium/Self/Centre/Ithaca**. These three dimensions present such complex meanings that each of them could represent a topic for a separate thesis. Consequently, we limit ourselves to a presentation of the first two axes in their essentialness and without exhausting the possibilities of interpretation.

I. THE CONCEPT OF 'COSMIC CHRISTIANITY'

As it is already known, the young Mircea Eliade was one of the best journalists of his country and the spiritual leader¹ of his generation. His series of militant articles had an obvious impact on Romanian society between the two World Wars. Romania was undergoing a period of change: the permanent instability existing in public life gave rise to political manoeuvres from inside and outside the country. In the climate of a general discontent and fight for power, characteristic to all parts of Europe of that period, a new nationalistic group emerged in 1927, under the name of *The Legion of the Archangel Michael* (Rom. *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*). This will form the nucleus of the movement known later under the name of *The Iron Guard*. A highly controversial organisation², *The Iron Guard* had a tremendous influence upon the Romanian intellectuals, precisely because it included in its ideology the latest currents of thought. As Eliade notes in his autobiography: 'the legionary movement had the structure and vocation of a mystical sect, and not of a political movement' ('mișcarea legionară avea structură și vocație de sectă mistică, iar nu de mișcare politică')³. The most important personality at the time, whose ideas came to be heavily utilised by *The Iron Guard*, was the University lecturer Nae Ionescu, the creator of a philosophical current called *trăirism* (from the verb 'a trăi'='to live'), characterized albeit controversially by Francisco Veiga as

¹It was said that in fact there were two leaders (both Nae Ionescu's students): Mircea Eliade and Mircea Vulcanescu. The later died in a Communist jail.

²See the study of Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Garzii de Fier, 1919-1941, Mistica Ultrationalismului* (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1991), p.170.

³Eliade, *Memorii...*, vol. II, p.30.

'a sort of mystical existentialism'⁴. Around him, a group of intellectuals formed a circle under the name of *Axa*. Among them there were Emil Cioran - the philosopher - and Mircea Eliade (for whom Nae Ionescu played the role of a spiritual guide⁵). In response to ethnic and political tensions, this group put forward the idea of national affirmation, expressed through religious feelings, that is Orthodoxy. They also redefined the concept of 'virility' (an influence of Papini's term 'maschilità ') as being asceticism and experience, intellect and eroticism at the same time (Eliade). Another feature of their ideology was the advancement of the notion of a New Man, that is the young 'hooligan'⁶ (Eliade); or they experienced life as a continuous negation (Cioran). Amongst the multitude of personal directions and credos, the **central-coagulative** element of their writings was **the nationalistic feeling**. Emanating from Nichifor Crainic's idea that the spirit of Orthodoxy was part of the *cosmic singularity* of the Romanian people, Mircea Eliade, influenced by Nae Ionescu's lectures, used extensively, in his articles, the notion of *Cosmic Orthodoxy*. He defined it as a religion which 'on the one hand projects the Christological mystery upon the whole of Nature, and on the other hand disregards the historical elements of Christianity, insisting, on the contrary, upon the liturgical dimension of man's existence in the world.' ('pe de o parte, ea proiectează misterul cristologic asupra naturii întregi, iar pe de alta, neglijează elementele istorice ale creștinismului, insistând, dimpotrivă, asupra dimensiunii liturgice a existenței omului în lume')⁷. He considered *Cosmic Orthodoxy* (along with the others) an original religious creation of

⁴Veiga, *Istoria...*, p.170.

⁵Eliade, *Memorii...*, vol. II, p.12.

⁶Far from having pejorative connotations, the term was used to express the notion of freedom, liberation from all constraints.

⁷Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis...*, p.246.

South Eastern Europe. The note of nationalistic Messianism is evident, as this phenomenon differentiated the Romanians from their neighbours (Poland, Hungary - Catholics, Russia - Slav Orthodox, Turkey - Muslims), giving them a sense of identity under a common denominator: a unitary religion (the political context of Romania dictated the reinforcement of territorial unity). **The identity and unity of the Romanian people under a common original religion** was the first derivative of the concept of *Cosmic Orthodoxy*. A second one was **the negation of the Old Testament** by bringing forward the awareness of a superior autochthonous South-Eastern religious creation. This way, the Romanians had a religion 'of their own', enriched with nuances of integration into the cosmic circuit:

The mystical solidarity with the cosmic rhythms, violently attacked by the Prophets of the Old Testament and hardly tolerated by the Church, was the centre of the religious life of the rural populations, especially of those from South-Eastern Europe. For all this part of Christianity, 'Nature' is not the world of sin, but God's creation.⁸

(Solidaritatea mistică cu ritmurile cosmice, violent atacată de profeții Vechiului Testament și de abia tolerată de biserică, se află în centrul vieții religioase a populațiilor rurale, mai ales ale celor din Europa de sud-est. Pentru toată această parte a creștinătății, 'Natura' nu este lumea păcatului, ci opera lui Dumnezeu.)

The originality of this form of Christianity was evident and negated any approach to a new form of Paganism or Pagan-Christian syncretism. According to Eliade, the *Cosmic-Christianity* represents 'an original religious creation in which eschatology and soteriology are affected by cosmic dimensions... ('o creație religioasă originală în care eschatologia

⁸Mircea Eliade, Aspecte ale mitului (Bucharest, Ed. Univers, 1974), p.161.

și soteriologia sunt afectate de dimensiuni cosmice...)⁹. In our opinion, the pivotal elements of this religion could be reduced to three: 1) **cosmic rhythms assimilated to a cosmic liturgy**; 2) **Nature sanctified by the presence of Jesus** and 3) **rejection of Old Testament's ideas**. 'The Romanians', wrote Eliade in one of his early articles, 'prolonged until nowadays the magnificent ^{at} attempt of Christianisation of the Cosmos, started by the Fathers of the Church, but interrupted in the Occident during Middle Ages.' ('Românii au prelungit până în zilele noastre acea magnifică încercare de încreștinare a Cosmosului, începută de Sfinții Părinți, dar întreruptă, din diferite motive, în Cursul Evului Mediu, în Occident.')¹⁰. A third consequence derived from the concept of Cosmic Christianity was its catalyst role in the crystallisation of the Eliadean theory known as the *terror of History*. The fact that *Cosmic Christianity* ignored any historical element¹¹ made from this religion a means for ordinary man to 'fight' History. This was a conservative view, and Eliade highlighted precisely its archaism, as this type of Christianity (the most ancient form) was wiped out by History in other parts of the world: 'As a consequence, the conservatism and the archaism of Romanian folklore saved a patrimony which belonged to Christianity in general, but which was annihilated by the historical process.' ('Prin urmare, conservatismul și arhaismul folclorului românesc au salvat un patrimoniu care aparținea creștinismului în genere, dar pe care procesele istorice l-au anihilat.')¹². The concept of 'fighting History' - in the mystical way of Christian meditation -, moulded on Nature's rhythms, responded to a specifically Romanian necessity of finding an

⁹ibid., p.161.

¹⁰Mircea Eliade, 'Destinul Culturii Românești' in Profetism Românesc, vol. I (Bucharest, Ed. Roza Vânturilor, 1990), p.147.

¹¹Eliade, Jurnal..., vol. I, p.534.

¹²Eliade, 'Destinul Culturii Românești' in Profetism..., vol. I, p.147.

answer to the historical vicissitudes which hit the country for centuries. This way, the *Cosmic Christianity* became 'a passive revolt against the tragedy and injustice of History, that is, against the fact that evil does not manifest itself exclusively as an individual decision, but especially as a transpersonal structure of the historical world.' ('o revoltă pasivă împotriva tragediei și a nedreptății istoriei, în fond, împotriva faptului că răul nu se manifestă exclusiv ca o hotărâre individuală, ci mai ales ca o structură transpersonală a lumii istorice.')¹³. We can also talk of a certain elitism, present in this messianic theory, which envisages the Romanian people as the *Chosen People*. Eliade used it as an argument for underlining Romania's importance and ascribes to this country a central role in the spiritual dialogue between Europe and other continents¹⁴, while later he noticed the enriching qualities of this form of religion for Christianity itself ¹⁵.

Eliade's adolescence in Romania - described in his autobiographical pages - preserves the aura of an 'exemplary' Time, a time of freedom of expression, thought and inner development, expressed in the unlimited possibilities of choice:

In the Romania of my adolescence and youth I could develop myself in a natural way. 'Religion' revealed itself to me, more like a form of culture. Eastern Christianity, 'Orthodoxy' was part of the Romanian people's history. I was free to examine the spiritual expressions and historical creations without any complex. I could judge them, I could criticise them and I could reject them without any risk. ¹⁶

¹³Eliade, *Aspecte...*, p.162.

¹⁴'... this sympathetic attitude towards the archaic ways of sensitivity and thinking makes it able, more than the Occidental cultures, to understand the spiritual situations of the non-European world and sustain the dialogue with this world.' Eliade, 'Destinul Culturii Românești', *Profetism...*, vol. I, p.146.

¹⁵'... Christianity in general and "Christian Philosophy" in particular, are susceptible of renovations if they develop "the Cosmic Christianity", with which the Romanian people came into maturity.' Eliade, *Jurnal...*, vol. I, p.535.

¹⁶Eliade, *Jurnal...*, vol. II, p.163.

(In România adolescenței și tinereții mele am putut crește în chip firesc. 'Religia' mi se dezvăluia mai degrabă ca o formă a culturii. Creștinismul răsăritean, 'ortodoxia', făcea parte din istoria neamului românesc. Eram liber să examinez aceste expresii spirituale și creații istorice fără complexe. Le putem(sic) judeca, le putem (sic) critica, și le putem(sic) respinge, fără nici un risc.)

Derived from nationalist and anti-communist feelings, Eliade's theory was part of a cultural current promoted by the Romanian intellectuals, a current whose central aspect was the accent put upon **religion**. This expressed a general attitude of the Romanian 'intelligentsia' at the time. As regards *The Iron Guard* movement, this co-ordinated its own ideology of nationalist mysticism¹⁷ with the latest intellectual fashion and consequently adopted some of the ideas we discussed earlier. The first basis of *The Iron Guard's* ideology was laid by **Iorga's nationalistic ideas** (this historian's policy was later rejected) and was based upon **Nichifor Crainic's concept of Romanian Orthodoxy**. Later it was orientated towards **Nae Ionescu's philosophical system**. All these Romanian movements formed part of a larger wave of neo-mysticism and religious spirituality of Europe in the 1920s, a wave which was represented by French neo-Thomism, Italian neo-mystics, Tagore and Chesterton.¹⁸

Eliade's concept of *Cosmic Christianity* probably had a trigger in his nationalistic convictions: 'I think that in any kind of nationalism, this love for the nation's eternity lives more or less evidently. And it seems to me that there is only one means to serve your people and country: to fight, in any way, for their eternity. A fight which everybody understands according to his/her inner nature and love.' ('Cred că în orice fel de

¹⁷In the conception of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (the leader of *The Iron Guard*), writes Eliade, 'the Legionary movement did not constitute a political phenomenon, but it had an ethnic and religious essence.' ('mișcarea legionară nu constituia un fenomen politic, ci era de esență etică și religioasă'), *Memorii...*, vol. II, p.26.

¹⁸For more information on these currents, see Veiga, *Istoria...*, p.168.

naționalism trăiește, mai mult sau mai puțin manifest, această iubire pentru eternitatea neamului. Și mi se pare că nu există decât un singur fel de a-ți sluji neamul și țara: de a lupta, pe orice cale, pentru eternitatea lor. Luptă pe care fiecare o înțelege după firea și iubirea lui.)¹⁹. Preconditioned or not, Eliade's concept of *Cosmic Christianity* (with the implicit idea of the refusal of time), played an essential role in the development of his universally applicable concept of 'the terror of History'. History meaning for him the political events that sabotage not only the important cultural creations of Man, but his identity itself, his equilibrium and imaginary universe.

¹⁹Eliade, 'România în eternitate', Profetism..., vol.II, p.127.

2. FOLKLORIC ELEMENTS

'In this part of Europe - considered lost after the establishment of Ottoman domination - were preserved treasures of spirituality which were once at the centre of European culture: Dionysian Thrace and Orphic Greece, Imperial and Christian Rome merged in this part of Europe and created the most valuable achievements' ('In această parte a Europei, considerată aproape pierdută după instalarea dominației otomane, s-au păstrat comori de spiritualitate care au făcut cândva parte din însuși centrul culturii europene: căci Thracia dionisiacă și Grecia orphică, Roma imperială și creștină, în această parte a Europei, s-au întâlnit și și-au plăsmuit cele mai de seamă valori')²⁰, writes the young Eliade in his article 'The Destiny of Romanian Culture'. He considered folklore the essence of the Romanian spirit. This is the reason for which Romanian myths and motifs appear all along this entire oeuvre, scholarly or fictional.

A central Romanian myth called *Zburătorul*²¹ ('The Flying Man' from Rom. 'a zbura'='to fly') is frequently integrated in many of his early literary writings: *Isabel and the Devil's Waters*, 'The Snake', 'Miss Christina', *The Return from Paradise*, *The Hooligans*. According to the literary critic George Călinescu, *Zburătorul* 'is an erotic myth, a personification of the puberty instinct', of love which is considered outside any participation at the conscious level of reasoning²². Most of the time the *Zburător* is imagined as a handsome man who erotically 'tortures' young girls in dreams. On awaking, they cannot find the explanation of their feelings which are in fact **the first arousal of love**

²⁰Eliade, Op.cit., in *Profetism...*, vol. I, p.150.

²¹In other variants the word is spelled *Sburătorul*.

²²George Calinescu, *Istoria Literaturii Române - Compendiu* (Bucharest, Ed. Minerva, 1983), p.38.

itself, whose primary object is the ambiguous *Zburător*. In 'Miss Christina', Egor - the painter - 'plays' the role of the *Zburător* in relation to the vampire Christina. She is attracted by the magical forces of voluptuousness which melt the barriers of Death. ('The souls of the dead thirst for any sort of biological abundance, or organic excess, for any such overflowing of life compensates for the poverty of their own nature and projects them into a swirling flow of potentialities and of the seeds of life.')²³ Unbearable feelings overwhelm Christina, who, driven by passion, risks her privileged 'existence' for some moments of 'real', physical caresses: ' "Who taught you to caress, you *Zburător*!'" the thought of Christina asked him. "Why do your hands burn me, why does your kiss kill me?" ' (' "Cine te-a învățat să dezmierzi, *zburătorule*!'" îl întrebă gândul Christinei. "De ce mă ard mâinile tale, de ce mă ucide sărutarea ta?!" ')²⁴. Christina lives at the boundary between life and death, and therefore is vulnerable to the laws of eroticism. (Excesses help, force life 'to move from one level to another, from one zone of reality to the rest. What was emptied of substance is replenished... .')²⁵ In a way she re-experiences the first symptoms of love in her new outwardly condition (as we saw earlier, the image of the *Zburător* is linked to the first arousal of love). She attempts to erase her profane past (marked by lust) and her passion for Egor takes the form of an aspiration to redemption. The *Zburător*-effects are felt in equal measure by the two mirrored feminine figures who move in parallel worlds: Simina (real life) and Christina (imaginary/oneiric life). The little girl Simina, a reincarnation of her aunt Christina, suffers *in concreto* the symptoms and expresses them in sadistic impulses towards the *Zburător*

²³Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.350.

²⁴Eliade, *Domnișoara...*, vol. I, p.123.

²⁵Eliade, *Patterns...* , pp.356-57.

incarnated by Egor. While in the imaginary world Egor is the one who 'torments' Christina (as in the myth), in a compensatory inversion Simina humiliates him in real life (she asks him to kiss her shoe, she bites and scratches his face). In the novella 'The Snake' the *Zburător* is represented by Andronic, the main character with an ambiguous profane identity. His erotic nature is made evident by his links with the serpents (he is their 'king'), reptiles with phallic connotations. His powerful masculinity captivates the imagination of the heroine Dorina, in sequences of erotic phantasies. Andronic, a personification of the *Zburător* has this one's characteristic of belonging and not-belonging at the same time to the loved woman. As in the myth, his identity hovers between human and superhuman.

In several novels and short stories, Eliade creates a **charismatic/Zburător-type personality** for his characters: many of them are artists and live at a threshold between the normal and a superior condition. Egor ('Miss Christina') is a **painter**, Petre (The Hooligans) practices **music**, Pavel (The Return from Paradise) is a **philosopher** and the character called 'the Doctor' (Isabel and the Devil's Waters) is an **intellectual genius**. They not only trigger sexual feelings in young girls, but also destroy them in a direct or indirect manner. Pavel, from The Return from Paradise, hurts Ghighi - the innocent student - by his indecision (he is unable to choose between her and the refined Una). The result is a traumatic provoked abortion. Petre from The Hooligans, after making Anișoara lose her virginity, drives her to steal money and jewellery from her aristocratic parents, thus shattering the girl's pride. The hero of Isabel and the Devil's Waters, 'the Doctor', builds up contradictory feelings in the virgin Isabel, who consequently has intercourse with a soldier while thinking she is making love to 'the Doctor'. Pregnant, she is punished by the latter's gesture of

marrying her, a gesture which humiliates her to the point of death. The same happens in the short story 'Maddalena'. The student painter encourages the development of sexual feelings in Maddalena, as a gratuitous game, without wanting a real sexual relationship - behaviour typical of the *Zburător*. As a result she offers her body to the first comer.

Eliade introduces a new element in the mythical dialectic underlying the construction of his literary texts. The *Zburător* from the myth is preconditioned to a **superior condition** and as such he never gets involved with his victims. This is not the case with the male Eliadean characters preserving the mythical creature's characteristics. Love, being such a strong feeling, destroys - in a proper or figurative way - the heroes themselves: Pavel (The Return from Paradise) kills himself, Petre (The Hooligans) becomes mad, "the Doctor" (Isabel and the Devil's Waters) suffers a sudden change of personality and repents of living through Isabel's child as his own child, and the painter from 'Maddalena' is stoned and treated as a pariah by his community.

Apart from the *Zburător* myth, the popular belief in *Blajini* (Rom. 'the Gentle Ones') appears in one of Eliade's most original novellas: 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'. According to tradition the *Blajini* are a mythical people, the first men who inhabited the Earth. They 'live under the earth - in some versions, at the end of the earth or in the Other World, over Saturday's Water... . The *Blajini* live a pious and unworried life, based on virtue and their incapacity of doing evil.' ('trăiesc sub pământ - în unele variante la capătul pământului sau pe Tărâmul Celălalt, dincolo de Apa Sâmbetei... . Blajinii duc o viață pioasă și lipsită de griji, întemeiată pe virtute și pe incapacitatea de a face rău.')²⁶. The *Blajini's*

²⁶Kernbach, Dicționar..., p.80.

Easter (usually held on the first Saturday or the second Monday after the Orthodox Easter) is the commemoration day of these strange beings. Some researchers even identify these people with 'degraded' images of the Brahmins.²⁷ Eliade used the motif in the novella 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats' in order to reveal its deeper existential and eschatological meanings. One of the characters, searching for **the Philosophers' Stone**, discovers that the symbolic-key to the Underworld mystery is contained in the belief in *Blajini*.²⁸ Apprehending that the *real* (=sacred) meaning of this custom hides an eschatological truth, he starts looking for this other realm:

... Iorgu realised that this belief hides a terrifying truth and that he who succeeds in understanding its meaning not only finds out the right place through which it is possible to descend into Blajini's world, but at the same time understands all the other secrets which the Church is not allowed to reveal.²⁹

(... Iorgu își făcuse părerea că credința aceasta ascunde un adevăr cutremurător și că cine izbuteste să-i înțeleagă tâlcul, nu numai că află pe unde se poate coborî în lumea Blajinilor, dar înțelege în același timp toate celelalte taine pe care biserica nu are îngăduința să le dezvăluie.)

Eliade's novelty consists in his method of linking **the universal myth of the Philosophers' Stone** with **the Romanian belief in Blajini**. Iorgu Calomfir started to look for *the Philosophers' Stone* and, after some time (during which he met foreign alchemists) he learned that the secret is there, in his land, where his family died and people still preserve their original eschatological beliefs. The ultimate property of *the Philosophers' Stone* being the conferring of immortality, the world of *Blajini* - an

²⁷ *ibid*, p.81.

²⁸ 'Iorgu remembered that the Romanian peasants, at Easter time, throw red eggshells into streams, and say that their water will carry them to the country of the *Blajini*, magic beings who live somewhere under the earth, and that the eggshells tell the *Blajini* that Easter has come.' Eliade, 'Pe Strada Mântuleasa', *In Curte...*, p.262.

²⁹ *ibid* ., p.262.

intermediate realm between life and death - implicitly acquires the same quality.

Eliade employed his knowledge of folklore in other pieces of fiction as well. The novellas 'Miss Christina' and 'The Snake' are exemplary here. They are constructed on dense webs of incantatory spells, magic beliefs and Christian elements. The mixture of Christianity (the symbolism of the cross, prayers) and magic (belief in the miraculous powers of iron against vampires, exorcisms) not only signifies the superimposed layers of modern man's religiosity, but is part of the Romanian folkloric universe (see the concept of *Cosmic Christianity*). Interviewed in 1936, after publishing 'Miss Christina', Eliade explained his intentions: '... I tried, in this new novel, to get close to the pure Romanian feeling of the fantastic, to what could have been called the strange presence of the fantastic which we meet in Romanian folklore.' ('... Am încercat în acest nou roman să mă apropii de sentimentul fantastic pur românesc, de ceea ce s-ar putea numi prezența fantastică, atât de stranie, pe care o întâlnim în folclorul românesc.')³⁰. The popular motifs specific to Romania create a magic, quasi-oneiric atmosphere, so characteristic of the Eliadean literary writings. In the short story called 'Loneliness', the old tradition according to which the fall of a star signifies death is the keystone supporting the whole symbolic construction of the writing. In 'I, the Holy Devil and the Sixteen Puppets', the main character charms the Devil with spells whose rhythms are obviously taken from oral folklore. This explanation of the constant introduction and remaking of the Romanian traditional themes in Eliade's fiction should be searched for in the writer's early *credo*,

³⁰Paul B. Martin, 'De vorbă cu D. Mircea Eliade' (Bucharest, 'Rampa, year XIX, nr 5660, 22 Nov., 1936) in Aurel Sasu & Mariana Vartig, Romanul românesc în interviuri - O istorie autobiografică, vol. I (Bucharest, Ed. Minerva, 1985), p.899.

expressed in his journalistic activity, in which he promoted the original values of his people:

We have, just like any other people, some legends and central intuitions on death and life, and an ethics and philosophy of the original culture could be based on them. The Romanian contemporary essay has the mission of filling this gap and of making this literary genre autochthonous.³¹

(Avem și noi, ca orice popor, câteva legende, câteva intuiții centrale asupra morții și vieții și pe baza lor s-ar putea organiza o etică și o filosofie a culturii originale. Eseul românesc contemporan are misiunea de a umple această lacună și a autohtoniza acest gen literar.)

In his essays Eliade emphasised the particular richness of some Romanian folkloric themes. One example is **the Gate**, considered by peasants to be a magic being who watches all the essential acts of people's life: 'The first passage under a gate means a near entrance into life, just outside real life. The Gate watches marriages, and the dead are taken to the grave under the gate. There is then a return to the primeval world; the cycle is closed and the gate lasts, year after year, to watch other births, other weddings, other deaths.'³² ('Prima trecere pe sub poartă înseamnă aproape o intrare în viață, în viața reală de afară. Poarta veghează la căsătorie, și pe sub poartă mortul e dus, solemn, spre lăcașul de veci. Este, atunci, o reîntoarcere în lumea dintâi; ciclul e închis, și poarta rămâne mai departe, cu un an mai puțin, să vegheze alte nașteri, alte nunți, alte morți.'). Eliade also encouraged the artists of his generation to make use of the popular traditions' themes in their work and select not the patterns or formal constructions, but the typically Romanian 'irrational source' from which they emerged. To sum up, he

³¹Mircea Eliade, 'Eseul european și eseul românesc', in *Manuscriptum*, 3/1986, (64) Year XVII, Bucharest, pp.86-89.

³²Eliade, *Insula...*, p.309.

rejected cheap imitations of folklore and advised the intellectuals to look for the spirituality underneath.

At the inauguration of the First Village Museum (Bucharest, 1936), Eliade did not fail to notice 'the amazing polymorphic aspect' of the peasant civilisation, which rejected aesthetic tenets the same way Indian architecture and iconography do. Romanian popular art shows its originality by the use of patterns, 'the technique of the "filled space" through endless repetition of the same form'³³, thus ignoring the aesthetic cannons.

After briefly reviewing Eliade's preferred themes and ideas concerning folklore, one inevitably come across the idea of the *terror of History*, a rejection of historical occurrences, sprung from the Romanians' desire to preserve their ethnicity. In one of his early articles³⁴ Eliade states: 'Few people could boast such an ill-luck in history, as the Romanian people.' ('Puține neamuri se pot mândri că au avut atâta nenoroc în istorie, ca neamul românesc.'). Explaining the consequences of the Ottoman occupation of the country, Eliade highlights an essential feature of his co-nationals, that is their **spiritual inwardness**:

The Romanians closed themselves even more inwardly against the danger represented by the Ottomans, and immersed themselves in their spiritual traditions, which were not only Latin-Byzantine, but pre-Latin as well, that is Geto-Thracian. The result was that the authentically Romanian folkloric genius emerged enriched from this secular process of interiorization.³⁵

(Față de primejdia pe care o reprezentau otomanii, românii s-au închis și mai mult în ei, s-au adâncit în propriile lor tradiții spirituale, care erau nu numai latino-bizantine, ci și pre-latine, adică geto-dacice. Rezultatul a fost că geniul popular, autentic românesc, a ieșit sporit din acest secular proces de interiorizare.)

³³Eliade, 'Muzeul Satului Românesc', *Insula...*, p.132.

³⁴Eliade, 'Destinul Culturii Românești', *Profetism Românesc* vol. I, p.139.

³⁵*ibid.*, p.143.

Eliade's formative period took place in a country situated between two worlds: the **Occidental, which considers history and rationalism essential**, and the **Oriental, based on contemplation, religion, mysticism**. It is a paradoxical position, reminding one of the concept of *coincidentia oppositorum*. Consequently, the Romanian people took different aspects from each type of spirituality and made them fit into a coherent view of the world. This explains one of the mechanisms underlying the cosmic dimension of their Christianity, the dialectic Eliade called *Cosmic Christianity*, for Christianity promoted the notion of history in its modern acceptation, while the cosmic dimensions annulled it. In Eliade's views, the reason behind the Romanians' well developed traditional spirituality is that 'folklore does not take history into account: on the contrary, it sabotages and devalues it. In the spiritual horizon proper to folklore, history is equated to the ephemeral, the insignificant and illusory' ('folclorul nu ține seama de istorie: dimpotrivă, o sabotează și o devalorizează. În orizontul spiritual care e propriu folclorului, istoria echivalează cu efemerul, nesemnificativul și iluzoriul.')³⁶.

In an overall perspective one can realise how these formative ideas grew in Eliade's later system of thought. As Adriana Berger remarked³⁷: 'Eliade's theory of art as ritualistic, archetypal, metaphysical, symbolic, and sacred originates in the influential writings of Evola and Coomaraswamy..., in his own Indian experiences, and in the deep roots of Romanian orthodoxy, which bears an integrative vision of cosmic Christianity.'

³⁶ibid., p.144.

³⁷Adriana Berger, 'Eliade's Double Approach: A Desire for Unity' in Religious Studies Review, 1985, vol.11, part 1, pp.9-12.

MYTHS

ZALMOXIS

Motto: ...the cult of Zalmoxis for example - like the myths, symbols and rituals lying at the basis of the Romanians' religious folklore - has its roots in a world of spiritual values that precedes the coming into being of the ancient great civilisations of the Middle East and Mediterranean.

(Mircea Eliade, De la Zalmoxis la Genghis-Han, p.17)

A key-figure in Mircea Eliade's studies of Romanian folklore and re-occurring image in his fiction, is the Thracian god **Zalmoxis**. Before considering Eliade's analysis of this myth in his scientific studies, we shall first attempt to find the reasons determining the historian of religions to give an essential place to Zalmoxis' myth in his scholarly and literary creation. In his diary, Mircea Eliade writes:

From time to time, 'I am seized' by passion for Dacia and Zalmoxis. I go back then to Herodotus' text, already read and reread for thirty-forty times until now, to other brief accounts about Getae's beliefs,... . Several days I am as if possessed; I do not do anything else but read again, dream over the documents and write countless pages with observations, commentaries, plans of study and future research.¹

(La răstimpuri, 'mă apucă' pasiunea Daciei și a lui Zalmoxis. Mă reîntorc atunci la textul lui Herodot, citit și recitit de vreo treizeci-patruzeci de ori până acum, la celelalte mărturii despre credințele geților,... . Câteva zile, sunt ca și posedat; nu fac decât să recitesc, să visez pe marginea documentelor, și scriu pagini nenumărate, cu observații, comentarii, planuri de studii și cercetări ulterioare.)

¹ Eliade, Jurnal..., vol. I, p.260.

As Mircea Popescu noticed, Romanian folklore was always at the centre of Eliade's interest, not only for a sentimental reason, but also for its extremely remote primordiality.² Moreover, Eliade had always expressed a preference for the myths involving an initiation scenario and for those difficult to 'decode' (mainly because of the documents' scarcity and incompleteness). These two last elements are, in our opinion other factors explaining Eliade's choice. The myth of Zalmoxis is also exemplary for the historian of religions' theory, according to which the popular creations are 'found somewhere between the level of pure principles (symbol, metaphysics, magic, which are the origin of any popular product) and that of immediate historical reality (happenings and men, the memory of which is stored by popular memory and projected into mythical categories)³. It is precisely at this border between myth and historical reality that Zalmoxis' paradoxical 'status' is situated.⁴ In his book From Zalmoxis to Genghis Khan, Mircea Eliade (as he admitted)⁵ experimented with a method of tackling both the popular and the historical traditions (whose documents were imprecise and scattered) of the Dacians, the Romanians' ancestors. In the chapter devoted to Zalmoxis, the historian of religions analyses the main ancient sources (Herodotus - Strabon - Plato) on the origin and the existence of the god, his doctrine and the ritual aspects of the cult. For our further study we chose from the historical material and Eliade's hermeneutic, only those significant elements that could be detected - in a more or less 'hidden' way - in his narrative.

²Mircea Popescu, 'Eliade and Folklore' in Myths and Symbols (Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p.89.

³Eliade, quoted by Mircea Popescu, 'Eliade and Folklore' in Myths..., p.88. The underlining is mine.

⁴In our opinion the alleged humble origin of Zalmoxis (former slave of Pythagoras, according to Herodotus' sources) so similar to Christ's condition, was an additional element that could have helped the rapid Christianisation of Dacia.

⁵Eliade, Incercare..., p.89.

Herodotus records that, according to the Greeks from the Hellespont and Pontus, Zalmoxis was a slave of Pythagoras, who - after gaining his freedom and becoming rich - returned to his country:

... wherefore he made himself a hall, where he entertained and feasted the chief among his countrymen, and taught them that neither he nor his guests nor any of their descendants should ever die, but that they should go to a place where they would live for ever and have all good things. While he was doing as I have said and teaching this doctrine, he was all the while making him an underground chamber. When this was finished, he vanished from the sight of the Thracians, and descended into the underground chamber, where he lived for three years, the Thracians wishing him back and mourning him for dead; then in the fourth year he appeared to the Thracians, and thus they came to believe what Salmoxis had told them.⁶

Showing a certain preference for Herodotus' writings (History IV, 93-6 being the oldest source of information), Eliade reaches the conclusion that the characteristics of Zalmoxis' cult were mysteric and eschatological: '... Zalmoxis would have revealed the possibility of obtaining immortality through an initiation which supposed a *descensus ad inferos* and an epiphany, a ritual "death" followed by a "rebirth".' ('... Zalmoxis ar fi revelat posibilitatea de-a obține imortalitatea cu ajutorul unei inițieri care comporta un *descensus ad inferos* și o epifanie, o "moarte" rituală urmată de o "renaștere".')⁷. Eliade also finds similarities between the **Eleusinian Mysteries** and the myth of Zalmoxis (e.g. the blissful post-existence) and highlights the resemblance of the Thracian god with Dionysus, Orpheus and other mythical characters⁸ endowed with certain powers which enable them to descend into the Underworld (*katabasis*). Rejecting the idea

⁶Trans. of A.D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library, vol. II, 1938, in Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World, ed. by Mircea Eliade (New York, HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p.67.

⁷Eliade, De la Zalmoxis..., p.80.

⁸In Dicționar al religiilor, Mircea Eliade and Ioan Petru Culianu compare Zalmoxis to Attis, Osiris and Adonis. (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1993), p.267.

according to which Zalmoxis would have had shamanic qualities (in From Zalmoxis to Genghis Khan, p.56 and Shamanism, p.390), Eliade considers instead the differences between the 'elitist' gods of the Mysteries (one of whom was Zalmoxis) and those of Death:

The gods and goddesses of Death reign over a crowd of dead people, while the divinities of Mysteries accept around them initiates only. Besides, we are talking about two different geographical eschatologies; the bright realms which await the initiates of the Mysteries should not be confused with the subterranean underworlds where the dead people gather.⁹

(Zei și zeițele morților domnesc peste o mulțime de morți, în timp ce divinitățile Misterelor admit pe lângă ele numai inițiați. Pe deasupra este vorba de două geografii eschatologice diferite; tărâmurile strălucitoare care îi așteaptă pe inițiații în Mistere nu se confundă cu Infernurile subterane în care se adună morții.)

The 'retreat' of Zalmoxis in an underground lodge is equated to a ritual and symbolic *katabasis*, a *descensus ad inferos* aiming at initiation.¹⁰ Mircea Eliade links the meaning of the god's refuge with other mythical caves and grottos, considered in other traditions sacred spaces that symbolise an *imago mundi* or other worlds. Herodotus also provides information about two Thracian rituals related to the belief in Zalmoxis: **1. the sacrifice of a messenger** to the god and **2. the shooting of arrows** skywards, during thunderstorms. In the first ritual, Eliade discovers behind the mythico-ritual scenario of **human sacrifice** (by being hurled aloft on a spear-point), 'an older and widely spread idea, that is, the wish to re-enact the primordial situation..., when people could directly and *in concreto* communicate with their gods.' ('o idee mai veche și mult mai răspândită în lume, adică speranța de a reactualiza situația primordială..., când oamenii puteau comunica direct și *in concreto*

⁹Eliade, De la Zalmoxis..., p.61.

¹⁰ibid., p.42.

cu zeii lor’.)¹¹. In a way, it could be said that the ritual brings about a disguised nostalgia of the eternal return to an *illud tempus*. The second ritual of **shooting arrows** also involves a way of communication between the humans sending their arrows towards the sky and their god. In Plato’s texts, the image of Zalmoxis is enriched with new meanings. The deity is presented as being concurrently **god-king-healer** and the concept of **‘soul’** stays at the core of Zalmoxis’ cult by supporting its ideology on **immortality**. As Mircea Eliade puts it: ‘Zalmoxis is the healing-god who is primarily preoccupied with the human soul and its destiny.’ (‘Zalmoxis este zeul-terapeut care se preocupă înainte de toate de sufletul uman și de destinul său.’)¹². Moreover, Zalmoxis was included in ‘the special category of the Apollonian visionaries and healers, known under the technical name of “iatromants”... ’(‘in categoria specială a vizionarilor și vindecătorilor apollonieni cunoscuți sub numele de “iatromanți”...’)¹³.

In this brief presentation of the myth we chose, as we underlined earlier, those particular aspects which appear in the literary writings of Mircea Eliade. We lumped these in four groups: **1. god’s occultation and epiphany**; **2. the symbolism of the underground lodge**; **3. the significance of the two rituals** (the human sacrifice and shooting of arrows skywards) and **4. Zalmoxis’ personality**.

It is a known fact that, in his fiction, Mircea Eliade ‘camouflaged’ several myths and beliefs by throwing a transparent curtain of ‘profane’ appearances over them. The writer does not cover the religious structure, but protects it, since for Eliade the sacred is the only universally valid reference. In conformity with his idea that ‘in the deep

¹¹ibid., p.63.

¹²ibid., p.63

¹³Eliade / Culianu, Dicționar al religiilor..., p.267.

psyché, initiation scenarios preserve their seriousness and continue to transmit their message, to produce mutations'¹⁴, the historian of religions employs the initiation scenario of Zalmoxis' myth in several of his stories and novels. The first element of the myth, **the occultation** (equivalent to a *descensus ad inferos*) appears in the novella 'Miss Christina'. The main character, a painter called Egor, visits a family and decides to remain there for a month. But strange things happen in the hosts' house, which seems haunted by the presence of a young girl, Christina, who died there, in a violent way. Another guest is an archaeologist doing excavations in the area, where he discovers a proto-historical settlement of a Greek-Thracian-Scythian civilisation. The real centre of the story is a cellar where the young Christina was buried. But this cellar is, in fact, a 'degraded' image of the underground lodge where Zalmoxis hid for three years. The magic condition of the place is made known by Sanda, Egor's fiancée:

Sanda showed them the stone steps... and the back walled lodge, where one of their ancestors hid for three weeks underground; a faithful servant used to bring him, during the night, a pot with milk and white bread. Sanda also showed them the breach through which the servant used to enter the lodge.¹⁵

(Sanda le arătase treptele de piatră... și încăperea zidită din fund, unde se ascunsese un strămoș al lor rămânând trei săptămâni sub pământ; un argat credincios îi aducea, noaptea, o oală cu lapte și o pâine albă. Sanda le arătase și spărtura prin care se strecura argatul.)

The cellar is sacred and a different level of existence, with 'other' dimensions, reigns there: love and death become one, Time is abolished and profane rules disappear, everything is suddenly possible. It is in the cellar that Egor 'kills', in a ritual way, the soul of the vampire Christina,

¹⁴Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1964), p.87.

¹⁵Eliade, *Domnișoara...*, vol. I, p.91.

with whom he had inescapably fallen in love. Death, as well, loses its connotations of finality and the suggestion of Zalmoxis' myth, with its concept of immortality, proves this.

In the novella 'The Snake', Andronic is a character able to re-enact, in a 'masked' way, the cult of Zalmoxis. A group of men, in search of wine, descend into a monastery's cellar, guided by a monk. There, an 'initiation' takes place, at the light of candles. Andronic falls into a strange ecstasy ('like a man drunk with another sort of wine')¹⁶ and begins to recount the story of the beautiful Arghira who died long ago, on that spot, after three nights of captivity. As death in a cellar cannot be 'definitive', the identity of Dorina (Andronic's future partner) could be deciphered as an epiphany of Arghira. This episode sheds light on a paradoxical scene in which Dorina makes an initiatory journey under water and sees there the dead Arghira, seated on a throne:

'Look carefully at her and you'll understand who she is', the young man said again. And she suddenly stopped, shivering. The girl on the throne looked familiar, particularly those wide eyes, and her pouting lips...
'Don't you see that you are the she ?! the young man exclaimed triumphantly.'¹⁷

('Privește-o bine și ai să înțelegi cine este', vorbi din nou tânărul. Și ea se opri deodată, tremurând. Fata din tron i se păru atunci cunoscută și ochii aceia larg deschiși, și buzele strânse,...
'Nu vezi că ești tu acolo ?! exclamă biruitor tânărul.')

But the greatest number of elements from Zalmoxis' myth are to be found in the novella 'The old Man and the Bureaucrats'. With this literary piece, Eliade attempted to 'bring out the particular significance of each symbol to exist and function in different contexts.'¹⁸ 'The Old

¹⁶Eliade, 'Șarpele', *Domnișoara...*, p. 189.

¹⁷ibid., p.218.

¹⁸Wilson M. Hudson, 'Eliade's Contribution to the Study of Myth' in *Tire Shrinker to Dragster*, 1968, vol.34, ed. Texas Folk Law Society, pp.219-41.

'Man and the Bureaucrats' is, as we showed in the previous chapter, the story of a retired teacher (Zaharia Fărâmbă) who, arrested by mistake, is interrogated by police. The old man tries to answer the questions of his inquisitors, but his answers are stories running one into another, spreading in a ramification of archaic ideas inserted in new contexts. From this perspective, Fărâmbă is concomitantly an old man who unknowingly provides important information to the police (profane level) and an initiator, a 'camouflaged' god, creating another world through the power of his words (sacred level). The narrative unfolds on a double plan of reference: a **profane** one (Fărâmbă's interrogation by the secret police agents) and a **mythical** one (his stories). 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats' is based on a texture of fragmentary myths and motifs and among these the main components of the Zalmoxian myth could be found: **1) the image of Zalmoxis** himself, as endowed with **magic and therapeutic qualities**; **2) the occultation and epiphany**; **3) the andreon**; **4) the underground sacred place** as a threshold between two worlds; **5) the sacrifice of a messenger** and **6) the shooting of arrows skywards**. The 'degraded' image of Zalmoxis is represented by the character called *Doftorul*, who is a magician, healer and an initiator *par excellence*:

The people called him Doftorul because he knew all kinds of remedies and he used to travel to foreign, distant countries. He had a good knowledge of many languages, countless sciences and he cured people and cows with simple empirical medicine. ... He was an unsurpassed prestidigitator, but he was illusionist and fakir as well, and God knows what else, because he used to work incredible things.¹⁹

(Oamenii îi spuneau Doftorul pentru că se pricepea la fel de fel de leacuri și tot umbla prin țări străine, depărtate. Cunoștea multe limbi, nenumărate științe și vindeca oamenii și vitele cu leacuri simple, băbești... Era un prestidigitator neîntrecut, dar era și iluzionist, și fakir, și Dumnezeu știe ce mai era altceva, căci făcea lucruri de necrezut.)

¹⁹Eliade, 'Pe Strada Mântuleasa,' in *In Curte...*, p.235.

Without doubt, *Doftorul* is an alter-ego of Zalmoxis who - according to the historical data - travelled to Greece and Egypt, was an astronomer and had mantic knowledge. The so-called 'tricks' performed by *Doftorul* are, in fact, concealed miracles. He made a huge aquarium, full of fish, appear out of a glass ruler, and entered and got out of the aquarium, without getting wet. 'Aquarium' could signify either the primordial ocean or a symbolic death to profane life (immersion in water means leaving a way of being, while emerging from it implies the attainment of a new modality of being). Thus, the 'trick' of *Doftorul* is either a schematic cosmogony or an initiation scenario. Another 'scheme' of his is also pregnant with initiatory elements:

After catching a small box out of the air, he enlarged it and asked Oana to keep it. Oana was a gigantic girl who looked 'like a cariatid'. Then he made a ladder from some matches and enlarged it as well. He asked the spectators to enter the chest and thirty to forty people named by him, entered the trunk. The last to step on the ladder was a priest. Next, Doftorul began to decrease the size of the chest until it disappeared and all those who had entered it suddenly appeared amid the audience.

This 'trick' contains, in our opinion, the essential co-ordinates of the myth of Zalmoxis: the experience of initiatory death through 'disappearance' (occultation) and 'reappearance' (epiphany). The trunk represents a closed, sacred place, another world, and its connotations are reminiscent of Zalmoxis' underground lodge. Those who entered the chest, the 'initiated', had undergone the complete eschatological experience: profane death (the trunk symbolised the coffin) and immortality. (Doftorul had also the power to change the age and look of his 'disciples'.) A symbolic equivalent of the andreon where Zalmoxis entertained his guests and taught his doctrine, is to be found in the pub of Fănică Tunsu, precisely where the group of 'initiated'

youngsters used to spend their nights, and where one of them, Lixandru, was reciting Spanish poetry²⁰. They specially enjoyed that part of the night - after three o'clock - when God 'descends upon the Earth'²¹. The **underground lodge** where Zalmoxis hid is symbolised in the novella, by a cellar. The search for this cellar - an underground threshold between two worlds - is an obsessive idea of the youngsters' group. Their quest for it began with Abdul, who taught his friends the 'signs' that could help them identify the 'real cellar'. Lixandru, Aldea and Ionescu look for it, each in his manner, while Iorgu Calomfir installs a laboratory in his own cellar (he wants to discover *the Philosophers' Stone*) and Oana enters the cave during her dreams. Lixandru becomes the most fervent in reaching the magic cellar that provides a breach in profane space. He has a glimpse of the other world, which 'is as in fairy-tales'²² and witnesses the disappearance of his friend Iozî - a rabbi's son - in an abandoned cellar. When police searches the place in order to find Iozî, they only discover an old wall, which turned to be a mediaeval fortification with traces of human habitat underneath. 'Decoded', the disappearance of Iozî is the **sacrifice of a messenger**, from the myth of Zalmoxis. At one point, Lixandru confesses: 'If I knew where the arrow disappeared and where Iozî were, *I would know everything !*' ('Dacă aş şti unde a dispărut săgeata şi unde se află Iozî, *aş şti tot !*')²³. The boys also had the habit of **shooting arrows skywards**:

²⁰ He recited verses from Calderón. Probably an allusion to *La vida es sueño* or *El divino Orfeo*.

²¹ Eliade, 'Pe Strada Mântuleasa', in *În Curtea...*, p.245.

²² *ibid.*, p.223.

²³ *ibid.*, p.259.

You used to gather on the vacant land and you shot arrows with your bow. You shot the arrows upwards, of course, since you got scared because you couldn't find Lixandru's arrow anymore..., when it was Lixandru's turn, you saw his arrow flying, you followed it for a while... , afterwards you couldn't see it any longer and you sat next to some stones, waiting for the arrow to fall back... But you waited like this around two hours and the arrow didn't fall back.²⁴

(Vă adunați pe maidan și trăgeați cu arcul. Trăgeați, evident, în sus, de când v-ați speriat pentru că nu mai găseați săgeata lui Lixandru... când a venit rândul lui Lixandru, ați văzut săgeata zburând, ați urmărit-o cât ați urmărit-o... apoi n-ați mai văzut-o și v-ați așezat pe lângă pietre, așteptând să cadă înapoi... Dar ați așteptat așa vreo două ceasuri, și săgeata n-a mai căzut.)

The link between this episode and the ritual practised by the Thracians who threw arrows towards their god, Zalmoxis, is evident. The elements of Zalmoxis' myth, scattered in this writing, prove the initiatory function of Fărâmbă's stories. He falls into the class of divine messengers or prophets who make sacred messages intelligible to mortals. By recounting the myth of Zalmoxis (and other mythical episodes) in a 'camouflaged' way, the character attains an *illud tempus* and thus freedom. Far from being defeated, Fărâmbă is a conqueror who passes all the stages in his eschatological way to freedom. The rank of his inquisitors is higher and higher, the interview conditions change (he is even served with champagne) and his last cross-examiner is Lixandru himself (he represents the 'destination' of the old teacher who was looking for him in the first place, before his arrest).²⁵ Even the original, Romanian title of the story, '*Pe Strada Mântuleasa*', supports the winner status of Fărâmbă: '*Mântuleasa*' is a word derived from '*mântuire*' = 'salvation', the approximate translation of the novella being, 'On the

²⁴ibid., p.228

²⁵We disapprove of Eugen Simion's interpretation, according which the old man is defeated by destiny ('...Fărâmbă is predestined to an eternal pursuit... The labyrinthine trial did not save him... This modern Scheherazade can expect difficult nights. The Shah changes, she has to indefinitely invent stories which will condemn her more.') Eugen Simion, 'Nivelele textului mitic', Postfață in *În Curte...*, by Eliade, p.633.

Street of Salvation'. Mircea Eliade himself expressed the idea of a triumphant Fărâmbă, as he represents the myth against the power of history, the Sacred defeating the Profane:

The novel is also a parable of the fragile man. Fărâmbă is the name of the old man and it means in Romanian 'crumb', 'fragment'. Now, it is precisely he who will survive, when the powerful ones fall. And this means that the one who is able to narrate can, in difficult circumstances, save himself.²⁶

(Romanul mai este o parabolă a omului fragil. Fărâmbă, este numele bătrânului, care înseamnă în limba română 'miez', 'fragment'. Or, tocmai el va supraviețui, pe când cei puternici vor cădea. Dar aceasta înseamnă că cel ce știe să povestească poate, în anumite împrejurări grele, să se salveze.)

Another writing with direct references to the myth of Zalmoxis is the short story 'The Ditches'. The main character, Mosu (Rom. 'the old one'), lets the people of his village know that he will not be able to die until a 'buried treasure' (which he had dreamt of) is found. The peasants begin to dig in order to accomplish his last desire, oblivious that their country is at war. In this narrative Eliade described one of the many ways of escaping the 'terror of History', as the countrymen were in fact 'digging' for their own past, for their mythology. But the profane historical events invade the place and Lieutenant Von Balthasar asks them to shovel in order to stop the advance of the Russian tanks. Von Balthasar, as a foreigner, remarks on the paradox of the situation: 'It is now that the treasures are found, when the world collapses... Sarmizegetuza !,' he exclaimed, his face brightening up suddenly. 'Do you still remember Sarmizegetuza ?' ('Acum se găsesc comorile, când se prăbușește lumea... Sarmizegetuza !' exclamă el, luminându-se deodată la față. Îți mai aduci aminte de Sarmizegetuza?')²⁷. Significantly,

²⁶Eliade, *Incerarea...*, p.156.

²⁷Eliade, 'Șanturile' in *În Curte...*, p.347.

Sarmizegetusa, the old capital of Dacia, was allegedly the place where Zalmoxis reigned. Von Balthasar also notices the continuity of beliefs in these places:

'Oh! Romania, Romania !', he exclaimed looking... over the village, over the hill. 'What a country ! What a people !... You remain what you were for so many thousands of years. The gods were scattered, Zalmoxis forgot you, but you remained as your ancestors predestined you...' ²⁸

('Ah ! Românie, Românie !' exclama el privind... peste sat, peste deal. 'Ce țară! ce neam!... Ați rămas ce-ați fost de atâtea mii de ani. S-au risipit zeii, v-a uitat Zalmoxis, dar voi ați rămas cum v-au ursit strămoșii voștri...')

The underlying idea of the text is the continuity of the sacred: although a *deus otiosus*, Zalmoxis could still function through the power of his myth. In accord with the Zalmoxian belief in immortality, the villagers are sure that Moșu 'cannot die' and their conviction should be understood in the light of the mythical ideology:

'He doesn't die', said Lixandru. 'We know him. He doesn't die.'
 Von Balthasar shrugged his shoulders and smiled.
 'We all die', he said with dreaming eyes. 'Even gods die. Even Zalmoxis died.'
 'God doesn't die', said Popa without looking at him. 'The real God doesn't die.' ²⁹

('Nu moare', spuse Lixandru. 'Il cunoaștem noi. Nu moare.'
 Von Balthasar ridică din umeri și zâmbi.
 'Toți murim', spuse el visător. 'Chiar și zeii mor. Până și Zalmoxis a murit.'
 'Dumnezeu nu moare', vorbi Popa fără să-l privească. 'Dumnezeu adevărat nu moare.')

Moșu is a keeper of the old beliefs and myths. He has the same initiatory role as Zalmoxis and thus he could be considered a reincarnation of the Thracian god. Von Balthasar again, is the one who

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.347.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.355.

intuits the real 'identity' of Moșu: 'He can't see anymore, he can't hear anymore, he can't talk any longer and now, in an instant or maybe in ten minutes, he will die. But he still remembers. After one thousand years, he remembers... .' ('Nu mai vede, nu mai aude, nu mai vorbește, și acum, într-o clipă sau poate în zece minute, va muri. Dar totuși își aduce aminte. După o mie de ani, își aduce aminte... .')³⁰. The villagers' initiation takes place before Moșu's 'second death' (symbolically, Moșu was already dead: he was unable to see, to hear, to talk). He miraculously raises from his death bed (like Zalmoxis from his underground lodge) and, followed by his countrymen, he goes outside the village. After finding (with his walking stick) a certain spot next to a hollow, he makes certain sacramental gestures to teach those surrounding him that the real treasure is their mythical past, 'buried' there, on that 'spot' which History (symbolised by war and dynamite) tries to destroy:

Moșu found the stones torn out and smashed by dynamite, he bent his knees and stretched his hand: he started to touch around. He took in his hand, one by one, the stones he found. This way he reached the edge of the cavity made by the first charge of dynamite. He still touched the ground for a while, as if it would have been difficult for him to understand... Ilaria felt him soften all of a sudden and she caught him in her arms.³¹

(Moșu a dat de pietrele smulse și sfărâmate de dinamită, și-a plecat genunchii și a întins mana, a început să pipăie. Lua în mână, una câte una, pietrele pe care le găsea. A ajuns așa în marginea gropii pe care o făcuse prima încărcătură de dinamită. A mai pipăit un timp, parcă i-ar fi fost greu să înțeleagă... Ilaria l-a simțit deodată moale și l-a prins în brațe.)

As we attempted to show, the myth of Zalmoxis is recurrent in some of Eliade's most important literary pieces. The author adapted this myth - more or less 'masked' - to the modern way of perceiving the world,

³⁰ibid., p.355.

³¹ibid., p.355.

while remaining perfectly aware of its impact on the reader ('initiatory symbols and scenarios survive on the unconscious level, especially in dreams and imaginary universes.'³²). Nobody has yet noticed the highly therapeutic function of Eliade's narrative. The author makes the reader experience a complete *renovatio* of his/her mode of being, the stress being shifted from a profane to a sacred vision of the world:

In a desacralized world such as ours, the 'sacred' is present and active chiefly in the imaginary universes. But imaginary experiences are part of the total human being, no less important than his diurnal experiences. This means that the nostalgia for initiatory trials and scenarios, nostalgia deciphered in so many literary and plastic works, reveals modern man's longing for a total and definitive renewal, for a *renovatio* capable of radically changing his existence.³³

The myth of Zalmoxis is characterised by **optimism and hope**, while preserving intriguing features like the ritual of **shooting the arrows skywards** and the **ritual sacrifice of a messenger**, characteristics that open ground to various interpretations. We employed the myth of Zalmoxis as a key to break the 'mythical code' of some Eliadean literary pieces, pursuing nevertheless the implications this process involves.

³²Mircea Eliade, *The Quest - History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p.126.

³³*ibid.*, p.126.

MASTER MANOLE

Motto: The legend alone 'accomplishes' that fantastic, irrational presence; it alone... introduces us into a folkloric universe, where the inorganic world possesses animated life and laws identical to the ones of organic life, where houses and churches are living beings and could last if a human life is sacrificed to them, so that they could live from its blood and soul, for eternity.

(Mircea Eliade, Insula lui Euthanasius, pp.325-26)

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental Romanian myths - the sacrifice required by the act of building a construction - is based on the legend called *Mănăstirea Argeşului* (Trans. 'The Monastery of Argeş'¹) or *Meşterul Manole* (Trans. 'Master Manole'). Mircea Eliade analysed the significance of this myth from a multitude of perspectives. Its archaism, metaphysical ideas, similarities with ancient Mysteries and polyvalence of meanings made the historian of religions employ this myth extensively in his fiction as well ('A General's Uniforms', Marriage in Heaven, The Hooligans). Before tackling specific topics of discussion we shall make a summary of the myth.

¹ Argeş is a region in the South of Romania, where the monastery was built.

The Romanian version of the ballad 'Mănăstirea Argeşului' starts with the search of a king called Negru-Vodă² and his ten workers (nine builders and their leading architect, Manole) for a special place to build a monastery. The king asks a shepherd met on their way, if he saw an abandoned, unfinished wall. Following the shepherd's directions, Negru-Vodă reaches the particular place he was looking for. It is there that he orders the erection of a monastery, to preserve his memory over the centuries. The ten workers begin the construction, but everything raised during the day, is crumbling during the night. Manole has a dream in which he learns that the abbey will last only if they sacrifice the first woman coming next morning to bring them food. Awoke, he tells his dream to the other masons, asking them, under oath, to keep the secret. Next day, the first woman rushing towards the scaffolding was Manole's wife (Ana) herself. The architect implores God to make the rain fall and blow a powerful wind, so that his wife would be forced to return. But nothing could stop his wife from continuing her journey towards her husband. Bound by his oath, Manole takes the woman in his arms and jokingly suggests to her a game: to wall her in. Soon, Ana realises that their play is, in fact, a death game. She then confesses to her husband that the pressure of the wall around her body kills the baby she is pregnant with. Nearly mad, Manole does not stop until he finishes immuring her. Following Ana's immolation, the walls stop falling and the masons craft a superb monastery, unmatched in beauty. Once the building is finished, the king rejoices at the view of such a masterpiece, but, anxious, he asks Manole and his fellow workers if they are able to build an even more astonishing edifice than that one. When the masons answer affirmatively, fearing that the team might make another monastery for a different sovereign, the king orders his servants to take down all the scaffolds and leave the ten constructors to die on the roof. The apprentices make wings from wood and try to land, but all are shattered into pieces, upon touching the ground. When Manole himself attempts to 'fly', he hears the voice of his wife from inside the walls of the monastery, complaining that the walls are crushing her. He dies of pain before reaching the earth and from his fallen body springs a well with salt water ('drenched by tears').

As Mircea Eliade highlighted, the construction ritual in general gave birth to a considerable number of legends about 'people buried alive at the

²The Romanian historiographers Constantin C. Giurescu and Dinu C. Giurescu clarified the fact that 'Negru Voevod' (falsely recorded under this name by popular tradition, monks and chroniclers of the time) was in reality Radu Basarab, the king who founded several monasteries and churches. The name 'Negru Voevod' was mistakenly transmitted, via churches and their chancelleries, for hundreds of years. For more information see Constantin C. Giurescu & Dinu C. Giurescu, *Istoria Românilor - Din cele mai vechi timpuri până astăzi* (Bucharest, Ed. Albatros, 1975.), p.263.

foundations of a palace, bridge, city, etc. These legends... are found in many European and Asian regions, but only in south-eastern Europe were they enshrined in ballads, that is, autonomous literary products.' ('ritualul construcției a dat naștere unui număr considerabil de legende despre oameni îngropați de vii la temelile unui palat, pod, cetate etc. Aceste legende ... se întâlnesc în multe regiuni europene și asiatice, dar numai în sud-estul Europei au fost ele creatoare de balade, adică de produse literare autonome.')³. In his books, Commentaries of Master Manole's Legend and From Zalmoxis to Genghis Khan, the historian of religions makes a comparative study of different Balkan versions of the ballad (modern Greek, Macedo-Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Albanian, Hungarian) and underlines the superiority of the Romanian version. Eliade quotes Skok, who spotted two elements of the ballad which appear only in the Romanian version: **Manole's invocations of God** in order to stop his wife's journey and the **final Icarian flight of the architect**.⁴ Other analysts, like Caracostea, pointed out **Manole's central position** in the Romanian variants and the **ritual function** of the ballad's beginning (the search for the magic place).⁵ Finally, Eliade himself attempts to prove that 'the Romanian ballad is not only superior to all the others in what concerns its equilibrium and artistic expression, but also because of its mythical and metaphysic content.' ('Balada românească nu e numai superioară din punct de vedere al echilibrului și expresiei artistice, ci și datorită conținutului său mitic și metafizic.')⁶.

Describing the ritual of sacrifice in different parts of the world, the historian of religions makes the pattern of archaic mentality evident: in order to last, a creation requires 'a soul' which must be acquired

³Eliade, Comentarii la Legenda Meșterului Manole, in Drumul..., p.399.

⁴ibid., p.403.

⁵ibid., p.409.

⁶ibid., p.409.

through a violent death (as a violent, unexpected end of life still preserves potentialities which continue to manifest themselves under another form). Eliade finds that the violent death of Manole (transformed into a well) shows the intuition of the Romanian people, who created the only possible way of reuniting the husband and wife:

It was his only means of finding his wife again. Not because he died as well; but because he met a 'violent death' which allowed him, even if in the form of the spring which started to flow on the spot where he fell, to remain close to his wife; more precisely, to exist on the same cosmic level with his wife. Not any form of death would have brought him nearer his sacrificed wife...⁷

(Era singurul său mijloc de a-și regăsi soția. Nu pentru că a murit și el; ci pentru că și-a întâlnit o 'moarte violentă', care i-a îngăduit, fie și sub forma izvorului care a început să curgă pe locul unde s-a prăvălit el, să rămână aproape de soția sa; mai precis, să existe pe același nivel cosmic în care exista și soția lui. Nu orice fel de moarte l-ar fi apropiat de soția jertfită...)

Eliade makes evident the **feedback** involved in the relationship between Manole's wife, **Ana**, and **the monastery**. On the one hand Ana gives her 'soul' to the construction, helping it to last; and on the other hand, she acquires another 'body', the monastery's 'body' which prolongs her life, lending her the characteristic durability of inorganic things. In our opinion, the heroine - half human / half monastery - acquires the capacity to last, at the same time, less and more than the mortals, her symbiotic situation accomplishing the archaic idea of *coincidentia oppositorum*. As Eliade noticed, 'the wife of Master Manole lives inside the monastery in the sense that the monastery itself forms her body' and 'if the Master would have died normally, he could not have met her, for the simple reason that she was not yet dead.'⁸ This power to transform a ritual of death into one of creation was, in Eliade's view,

⁷ibid., p.453.

⁸ibid., p.454.

specific to Romanian people. (Both *Master Manole* and *Miorița* - the masterpieces of the Romanian folklore - are based on this idea.) The fact that this myth, with its ancient roots, was crafted into literary creations in only that part of Europe, shows that it was moulded on the autochthonous mentality:

Even if this central myth has its roots in an ancient ecumenical metaphysics, the fact that it was chosen and fructified in the south-east and Romania proves that it accomplished a certain spiritual need, that met there a certain resonance it would not have met elsewhere.⁹

(Chiar dacă acest mit central își are rădăcinile într-o metafizică străveche, ecumenică, faptul că el a fost ales și a fructificat în sud-est și România, dovedește că satisfacea o anumită nevoie spirituală, că întâlnea o rezonanță pe care n-o întâmpina aiurea.)

THE ARCHAISM OF THE MOTIF

Eliade was concerned with the archaism of the sacrifice ritual, found in traditions all over the world: prehistoric Italy, the ancient Middle East, modern India, Meso-American cultures, Indochina, China, Polynesia, Japan:

... the discovery of skeletons in the foundations of sanctuaries and palaces from the ancient Middle East, in prehistoric Italy and in other parts of the world, leaves no doubt concerning the reality of this kind of sacrifice. ... Sacrifices relating to construction are found almost everywhere in the world, in the form of attenuated ritual, legend or vague belief.¹⁰

⁹ibid., p. 474.

¹⁰Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis...*, p. 185.

(... descoperirea scheletelor în fundațiile sanctuarelor și palatelor din anticul Orient apropiat, în Italia preistorică și în alte părți nu lasă nici o îndoială asupra realității unor asemenea sacrificii....

Sub formă de ritual atenuat, de legendă sau de vagi credințe, sacrificiile de construcție se regăsesc aproape pretutindeni în lume.)

The paradigm of these forms of sacrifice, Eliade holds, is the **cosmogony myth** which explains Creation by the killing of a primordial being (giant, young girl, hero, Mother-figure)¹¹. The cosmogony myth *par excellence* carries within itself the schema of all the myths and rituals concerned with 'creation' in general. As the sacrifice aims at a transfer of life to the new construction, this procedure is accomplished 'in conformity with a divine model, repeating the initial act of creation.' ('în conformitate cu un model divin, repetându-se actul inițial al Creației.')12. Thus we can assert that the master *Manole* imitates Divinity as creator of the world. Also the immolation of Ana in the context of a ritual love 'game' - whose description is strewn with erotic elements - could be interpreted, in our opinion, as a **hierogamy**. Ana is the image of the **Great Mother** (her pregnancy is significant) who brings the **feminine principle** into the ritual, helping Manole achieve that balanced state, above human limitations, which triggers godlike possibilities of creation. (It is the same principle depicted in Tantric iconography: the god Śiva entwined with his own 'power', Kali, the feminine deity.) Endowed with this new force, Manole surpasses himself (any 'creation' requiring an 'animation' 'revealed man's powerlessness to create apart from his own species'¹³) and enters the sacred realm (his miraculous death ultimately unites him with his wife on another cosmic level). As a rule, creation perfects itself through either a **hierogamy** or

¹¹ ibid., p.187.

¹² Eliade, *Comentarii...*, in *Drumul...*, p.428.

¹³ Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.427.

a **violent death**, because it depends on sexuality and a voluntary sacrifice.¹⁴ In Manole's case we can talk about the accomplishment of both conditions. According to Eliade, the presence of the initiation trials in the ballad shows traces of Mystery rituals whose scenarios presuppose **a symbolical re-enactment of a divine hierogamy** and **revelations of an eschatological nature**. As this hypothesis opens a path for our future investigation, we shall present it further.

THE INITIATION TRIALS

Masonry is an ancient occupation and was always associated with a certain hermeticism, owing to its internal function of 'creating' something new, 'giving birth' through artificial means, and by this, getting dangerously close to Divinity:

The mason-masters preserved, until the last century, 'professional secrets' of an undebatable archaism. ... construction works suppose a ritual and symbolism coming from a very ancient past. Any craft, but especially those of mason and smith, was charged with a ritual significance and a symbolism strictly reserved to the 'initiates'.¹⁵

(Meşterii-zidari au conservat până în secolul trecut 'secrete de meserie' de un incontestabil arhaism. ... lucrările de construcție comportă un ritual și un simbolism care ne vin dintr-un trecut foarte îndepărtat. Orice meserie, dar mai ales cele de zidar și de fierar, era încărcată de o semnificație rituală și de o simbolică strict rezervată 'inițiaților'.)

This special status of the builders implies the condition of a close group. In this order of ideas, the oath made by Manole and his fellow masons to keep the secret of the future sacrifice might be an expression of the

¹⁴Eliade, Mituri, vise și mistere în Eșuri..., p.270.

¹⁵Eliade, De la Zalmoxis..., p.179.

archaic mentality. Apart from this, the **initiation trials** which Ana has to pass before reaching the building site 'present evident affinities with the "obstacles" of the initiate in the ancient Mysteries.'¹⁶ Eliade reaches the conclusion that 'If we were to accept this suggestion, we would interpret the travel of "the wife" towards the monastery as a journey towards the "centre", that is: an initiation, with all its known dangers and attempts...' ('Dacă ar fi să acceptăm această sugestie, am interpreta drumul "soției" către mănăstire ca un drum spre "centru", adică: o inițiere, cu știutele ei primejdii și încercări...')¹⁷. The elements proving the **eschatological character** of Ana's initiation are constructed in parallel sequences which bear incantatory significations. The **rain-flood** provoked by God (following Manole's first invocation), which made Ana traverse waters, clearly symbolises death, in the same way as does the **hurricane-storm** (following the second prayer) which destroys trees and overturns mountains. In our view, this is an apocalyptic scenario suggesting the destruction of the world and a return to a pre-formal state, the perfect environment for a future hierogamy of Ana-Manole. Not only does Ana have to overcome specific trials, but Manole himself is subjected to two particular tests: **to build a monastery on a cursed place** (the previous construction was abandoned and dogs barked around it as if they felt a demon around) and **to sacrifice his wife and unborn child**. In the first requirement we can detect the hidden motif of the **fight with the Devil**, as the site has to be snatched from malefic forces, which must be exorcised in order to return the land to its primordial sacrality ('monastery' represents sacrality *par excellence*). The second test is reminiscent of a doctrine of renunciation.

¹⁶Eliade, *Comentarii...*, in *Drumul...*, p.473.

¹⁷ibid., p.473.

Both Manole's trials, like Ana's, are reminiscent, in our view, of an eschatological scenario.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'THE VIOLENT DEATH'

The motif of 'violent death' in the archaic mentality is based on the principle of equilibrium which reigns over the Universe. Creating 'something' requires the sacrifice of something equally valuable, in order to maintain the general flux of life in Cosmos. This theme of sacrifice required by creation is expressed in the myth of *Master Manole* on two levels: the sacred **immolation of Ana** and **Manole's disappearance**, both of them necessary for the construction to last. **Ana's immolation** occupies a central place in the ballad and her sacrifice perfectly fits the archaic schema:

Only the ritual death (violent death) is creative, for the simple reason that it interrupts the thread of a life which did not exhaust all its possibilities, and therefore had not fulfilled its destiny; also the ritual death.... releases a force that not only makes possible the 'transmission' of life, but also ensures the perennality of the creation to which it gave birth.¹⁸

(Numai moartea rituală (moartea violentă) este creatoare, pentru simplul motiv că ea întrerupe firul unei vieți care nu și-a consumat toate posibilitățile, care nu și-a îndeplinit destinul; de asemenea moartea rituală..., declanșează o forță care nu numai că face posibilă 'transmisia' vieții, ci asigură perenitatea noii creații căreia i-a dat naștere.)

In this light, Ana's pregnancy is envisaged as an element increasing the duration of the monument, as not only is the woman's life cut short, but that of the foetus as well. Both of them continue to exist in the 'body' of the monastery. Ana is finally reunited with her husband (she =

¹⁸Eliade, *Comentarii...*, in *Drumul...*, p.451

construction; he = well), while the foetus is condemned to the eternal life of a Homunculus. Mircea Eliade pointed out that 'the existence of an architectonic "body" is not paradoxical, except for the modern mind... . The archaic mentality recognises a plurality of cosmic levels in which "life" and "Man" could both live.' ('Existența unui "corp" arhitectonic nu e paradoxală decât pentru concepțiile moderne... . Mentalitatea arhaică recunoaște o pluralitate de niveluri cosmice în care "viața" și "omul" pot exista.')19. Death in *Master Manole's* myth accomplishes the function of a 'transfer' from one level of existence to another: from Profane to Sacred, from ephemeral to eternal, from human to cosmic level.

An essential detail proving the archaism of the Romanian ballad is **Ana's acceptance of destiny with resignation**, while in the Balkan variants the wife tries to escape and protests vehemently.²⁰ The explanation resides in the fact that the Romanian version is from those times when the functioning of the ritual was powerful and represented the supreme, unquestionable 'reality'. In his study, Mircea Eliade focused on the world-wide traditions which preserve the belief that **the one who builds something should die when the construction is finished**.²¹ This belief forms part of a more extended mythical schema according to which the first person who sees or is in contact with a new creation, has to die ('The first one brought by destiny is destined to die')²² and thus, usually it is the master himself who is predestined to disappear. The explanation lies in the fear of perfection guiding the mentality of the popular universe, **fear of perfection** which becomes an alternative form of **fear of death**: 'Man cannot make anything

¹⁹ibid., p.455.

²⁰This difference between ballad's versions was noticed by Caracostea. See Eliade, De la Zalmoxis..., p.181 and Comentarii... in Drumul..., p.409.

²¹Eliade, Comentarii..., in Drumul..., p.415.

²²ibid., p.417.

perfect, except with the price of his life. Only God could create something without depriving or diminishing his being. Man being himself created, is sterile as long as he does not animate the work of his hands with his own sacrifice...' ('Omul nu poate crea nimic desăvârșit decât cu prețul vieții sale. Numai Dumnezeu poate crea fără să-și sărăcească sau să-și diminueze ființa. Omul fiind făptură, fiind el însuși creat, este steril atât timp cât nu-și însuflețește creația mâinilor cu jertfirea sa...')²³. There is a certain 'vampirism' of the inorganic life, of the created things which aspire to take part in the organic world, by pulling out the soul of the first mortal who enters into contact with them.²⁴ In our opinion, it is this fear for the finished work (and not the pride as is generally interpreted) that makes the master masons from the ballad answer affirmatively to the king, when asked if they could build a more beautiful monastery. By sacrificing his wife Manole sacrificed himself and if we analyse his behaviour from this perspective, we can detect Manole's awareness of his own death's imminence, an awareness which could have led to his desire to keep his wife close to him (on a cosmic level) and consequently, to immure²⁵ her.

CHRISTIAN ASSIMILATION OF ARCHAIC ELEMENTS

In the myth of death at the core of the *Master Manole* ballad Eliade sees 'an archaic and at the same time, Christian vision: life is a sacrifice and a

²³ibid., p.416.

²⁴ibid., p.431.

²⁵The archaeological discoveries (II B.C. - I A.D.) linked to the funerary beliefs and practices of the Geto-Dacians (the Romanians' ancestors) testify the use of human sacrifice in certain situations (e.g. killing of wife and children at a husband's death, immolation at the foundation of a new construction). Valeriu Sîrbu, Credințe și practici funerare, religioase și magice în lumea geto-dacilor (pornind de la descoperiri arheologice din Campia Brăilei), (Galați, Ed. Porto-Franco, 1993), p.40.

mystery through which man perfects himself, acquiring a superior way of being in the world'. ('o viziune arhaica si totodata crestina: moartea e jertfa suprema, e un mister prin care omul se desavarseste, dobandind un mod superior de a fi in lume.').²⁶ In the Balkan area, he observed, a church or a monastery commonly symbolised the entire Cosmos, the celestial Jerusalem or Paradise itself. This new symbolism was in fact a 'recent religious revaluation (Christianity) of an archaic symbolism: because the concept of a sanctuary as *imago mundi* and "Centre of the World" was already present in the palaeo-Oriental cultures (Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China etc.' ('o revalorificare... recentă (creştinismul) a unui simbolism arhaic: căci sanctuarul ca *imago mundi* şi "Centru al Lumii" este deja atestat în culturile paleo-orientale (Mesopotamia, Egipt, India, China etc.).²⁷ The Christian elements that were grafted in the ballad are multiple. Manole's prayers to God, invoking the Creator's help in order to impede the journey of his wife, are possibly a Christian interpolation. Also Manole's decision to sacrifice his wife could be interpreted as a supreme act of faith in Divinity.

THE PERENNITY OF THE BALLAD

The richness of the ballad's meanings allows several interpretations that could be directly linked with universal myths and mythical figures of civilising heroes (e.g. **Icarus** - the attempted flight of Manole and his fellow masons; **Prometheus** - the condemning of Manole to be isolated on the monastery's roof; **Iphigenia** - Ana's sacrifice; **Job** - Manole's total faith in destiny). Apart from these there are, in our

²⁶Eliade, Profetism..., vol.I, p.148.

²⁷Eliade, De la Zalmoxis..., p.183.

opinion, other myths and motifs which could be related to this ballad in an indirect way: the **Faustian myth and the pact with the Devil** (life in exchange for glory); the **renunciation of the fruits of one's acts**; the symbolical **identity mason = smith / masonry = alchemy**; the myth of **Pygmalion and Galatea** (mixture of creation and love up until their identity, desire to animate the stone).

Eliade, recognising the perennity of the ballad, integrated or reshaped its elements in his literary creations. It is the identification of this myth with a central Romanian conception of life, death and creation that made the historian of religions not only study it in a scientific way, but incorporate it in his narrative. He acknowledged that 'the adhesion of a people to one or another mythical scenario, to one or another exemplary image says more about its profound soul than a great number of historical happenings.' ('Adeziunea unui popor la unul sau la altul dintre scenariile mitice, la una sau la alta dintre imaginile exemplare, spune mai mult despre sufletul lui profund decât un mare număr de întâmplări istorice.').²⁸

In the Eliadean novel Marriage in Heaven the woman in love with a writer (Mavrodin) understands that the artist's condition is different from other peoples' lives. Although she wants a child, she renounces her pregnancy in order to set Mavrodin free to create:

... How selfish I used to be... I wanted to keep you for myself only... Absurd !... You are not like the others, like us... Master Manole's wife immured herself in the foundation of the building while I feared a much less important sacrifice...²⁹

(... Ce egoistă eram înainte... Voiam să te păstrez numai pentru mine... Absurd! Tu nu ești ca ceilalți, ca noi... Soția Meșterului Manole s-a zidit pe sine la temelie, și eu mă temeam de o jertfă mult mai neînsemnată...)

²⁸Eliade, De la Zalmoxis..., p.191.

²⁹Eliade, Nunta în cer in Maitreyi..., p.259.

In the short story 'A General's Uniforms', Eliade employed this myth (beside other myths and motifs) in a such a 'camouflaged' way, that an informed reader could detect it only when he reaches the 'key' (some explicit verses of the ballad itself). The story develops on superimposed plans. As two different plots take place at the same time, in the same house, Eliade situated them on two spatial levels: **garret** and **dining room**. In the latter, a young girl (the exceptionally talented cellist, Maria Da Maria³⁰) talks to a famous musician, Antim. In the garret, two young boys, Ieronim Thanase³¹ - Antim's nephew - and his friend Vladimir Iconaru³² search for the General's uniforms and a collection of butterflies. The first couple Maria-Antim re-enacts the pair Ana-Manole, their identity being disclosed in 'microdot-like' allusions, containing in brief and concentrated sequences (which we shall call *decantations*) fragments of the myth underlying the text. These *decantations* are peripheral to the main thread of the plot and consequently, difficult to spot at a first reading. One of these *decantations* is related to the trunk (discovered in the garret by the two boys) which belonged to an old owner of the house, a woman nicknamed 'The She-General'. She laid in the chest all the clothes that were considered of some importance for the family: folkloric costumes for carnivals, a bride's dress, her husband's uniforms, a green dress with a high, laced collar, etc. Opening the trunk after a long time, when nearly all the members of the family were dead,

³⁰The mnemotechnic of the name highlights the word 'aria' (musical aria): **Maria Daria Maria**.

³¹'Ieronim' has the connotation of 'genius' in Romanian, since the poet Eminescu wrote several novellas where the main character represents the Romantic image of genius. 'Thanase' could be derived from 'Euthanasius', again another character equated to the image of genius in Eminescu's writings and 'Tănase' - the most popular actor in Eliade's time.

³²The name Vladimir (мир = 'peace') is directly linked to the sacred condition of the boy who had a dove in his hand when Ieronim 'discovers' him and notices that he is a 'bearer of an entire mythology'. 'Iconaru' comes from the Romanian word *icoană* = 'icon'.

the last descendant of this ancient and noble family, Ieronim, explains to his friend, Iconaru:

How obvious is here, as in all the smallest details, the presence of the She-General's hand ! She put things in a coffer the same way others, in other times, built monasteries or raised pyramids. Look at this beautiful bed sheet, white and well pressed, as if she had packed it yesterday, or the day before yesterday, and, look, let your hand feel its silky texture, similar to a shroud...³³

(Cum se vede și aici, ca în cele mai mici amănunte, mâna generăleseii ! Așeză lucrurile într-o ladă așa cum alții, altădată, zideau mănăstiri sau ridicau piramide. Ia privește ce frumusețe de cearșaf, alb și bine întins, parcă l-ar fi așternut ieri-alaltăieri, și, uite, pune mâna și vezi cât e de mătășos, parcă ar fi un giulgiu...)

Three symbolic equivalents of the monastery, alluding to the ballad *Master Manole* can be noticed in the story: the ancient, crumbling house, the trunk which belonged to the General's wife and the bride's dress found in the coffer. Another *decantation* regarding the myth appears in the commentaries of the same Ieronim (who, as an actor, has the role of revealing the sacred in a 'camouflaged' way). He disclosed to his friend the story of the General's daughter, who died in a bombardment. This apparently profane story in fact re-enacts Ana's immolation from the ballad *Master Manole*:

'But she was terrified of bombardments, and when the alarm sounded, she took her children and they went to the air-raid shelter at the end of the street, at the junction with Popa Nan... . All of them were transformed into dust and ashes', he added. '... In vain the She-General fought, in vain she went to the palace to ask for a special squad to excavate the shelter and to search for them. To find her daughter at least.'³⁴

³³ Eliade, 'Uniforme de General' in *În Curte...*, p.414. The underlining is mine.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.415.

('Dar avea groază de bombardamente, și când s-a dat alarma, și-a luat copiii și s-au dus în adăpostul antiaerian din capătul străzii, colț cu Popa Nan. ... Praful și pulberea s-a ales de toți', adăugă.'... Zadarnic s-a luptat generăleasa, s-a dus până la palat, să obțină o echipă specială să dezgroape adăpostul și să-l caute. Să-i găsească măcar fata.')

The couple **Maria - Antim** is a 'degraded' version of the mythical one: **Ana - Manole**. They search for each other in different lives, not being able to remain together, but in spirit. Both, Eliade's short story and the ballad contain in their ideation structure the triad: **Creation - Love - Death**. Antim (called by his nephew by the fond name of 'Manolache', a diminutive of 'Manole') is followed in the street by a young girl who desires to take some music lessons with him. She is the 'bearer of sacred messages' *par excellence*, because she is 'the Foreign One' ('So, you are a *foreigner*. I repeat this to you because I always feel I find out the important, the significant news, from foreigners, from people who came from another part. In my imagination, they come from *another world*,') (' Va să zică, ești *străină*. Îți repet asta pentru că întotdeauna am simțit că veștile importante, noutățile semnificative le aflu de la străini, de la oameni veniți din altă parte. În imaginația mea, vin, din *altă lume*, ...').³⁵ Maria is obsessed by the misfortune of people bestowed with great talent, but Ieronim tells Antim and Maria they do not have to be afraid of their 'tragic destinies' and 'ill-luck' because these are the very conditions of the creative genius. The heroine accepts (like Ana in the ballad) her sacrifice with resignation: 'I do know what misfortune is, calmly interrupted Maria. Since I've known myself, I've been followed by bad-luck.' ('Eu știu ce este nenorocul îl întrerupse calma Maria. De când mă cunosc, mă urmărește nenorocul.')³⁶ The allusions to the ballad are numerous: Antim could not find anyone to surpass him as a musician,

³⁵ibid., p.419.

³⁶ibid., p.432.

just as Manole surpasses all the other masons in skill; the hero from the short story is preoccupied not to scare Maria, who will be immured - in a symbolical way - in a wedding dress; the inverse initials of their names: **M**aria - **M**anole and **A**ntim- **A**na suggest the interchangeability between the ancient and the 'new' couple and their symbolic androgyny (required in order to create something above normality and laws). Antim is not only a musician, but an exceptional chess player as well (art and mathematics = **architecture**), while Ieronim, **the eternal child** trapped in a mirror, could be a replica of the unborn child of the ballad, condemned to live in the form of art only. The great musician Antim is cursed in love. All the 'foreign' women he loved left him after he told them a story, with whose hero he identified. Their 'disappearance' is in fact a sign of death: as in the ballad of *Master Manole*, **the closeness to creation kills**. Laetitia, Melania, Maria Da Maria are one and the same woman, the Ultimate Woman, the Foreign One, which is Death. The General's wife, while alive, told Antim (who always awaited that unknown, inaccessible fiancée who deserted him 'some hundreds years ago'³⁷) that 'for a man, no woman is *foreign*. Men meet the Foreign One once in a lifetime, and then, in any case, it is too late.' ('pentru un bărbat nici o femeie nu e *străină*. Bărbații întâlnesc o singură dată în viață Străina, și atunci, în orice caz, e prea târziu.')³⁸. Maria Daria Maria, the last woman, 'disappears' as well (although in a different way), after revealing her identity: she is the mythical Ana - Manole's woman³⁹:

³⁷ibid., p.445.

³⁸ibid., p.446.

³⁹We hope that our interpretation answers Eugen Simion's question: 'Other facts that should be decoded remain in the subtext. For example, who is the *foreign one* who appears and disappears from Antim's existence?' Eugen Simion, 'Postfață' in *Eliade, La Umbra...*, vol. V, p.239.

'You don't recognise me anymore, maestro', she said in a very low voice. 'It's true, so much time has passed', she added.

She remained silent for an instant and afterwards she began to recite:

'Manole, Manole

Master Manole...

Manole, Manole, master Manole, you didn't forget only the fiancée, but the engagement as well...'.⁴⁰

('Nu mă mai recunoști, maestre', spuse foarte încet. 'E adevărat, a trecut atâta timp', adăugă.

Tăcu o clipă, apoi începu să recite:

'Manole, Manole,

Meștere Manole...

Manole, Manole, meștere Manole n-ai uitat numai logodnica, ai uitat și de logodnă...').

The engagement is one with Death herself, envisaged as a bride. Maria is **symbolically 'immolated'** by Ieronim (the continuator of Antim) who wraps her shoulders **with the bride's dress**⁴¹ he found in the old trunk from the garret. Antim's death is expressed by his disappearance in the mirror which symbolises the waters of the well into which Manole was transformed. The story which changed Antim's life was about a jester who suddenly, just before one of his shows, realises that his original job was to entertain gods, not people, kings or servants. His function was a sacred one.⁴² By identifying with the hero of the story, Antim becomes unable to play for people, equating his auditors with 'decadence' and pursuing his search for perfection in itself. The same **drama of decadence** could be encountered in the ballad *Master Manole*. The master pays so dear a price (his wife), because he was

⁴⁰Eliade, 'Uniforme de General', in *În Curte...*, p.446.

⁴¹In the Romanian tradition (as in many other parts of the world) dead unmarried young girls are dressed in wedding dresses for burial.

⁴²The 'story' might be linked to a mediaeval legend wrote by Anatole France, about a jester who, after becoming a monk, used to perform his old tricks, closed in the chapel, in front of the Virgin Mary statue, as a homage to her. This legend is narrated in Eliade's novel *Marriage in Heaven*.

punished by God. He forgot that creation should be restricted to Divinity only; it was not intended for kings like Negru-Vodă.

By studying a certain topic in depth in his scientific research (i.e. the *Master Manole* myth) and using it in his literary writing, Eliade always established a special relationship between his two ways of looking at the same problem. There is always a bridge between them, due to what he called 'the personal factor'. In an interview (when 27 years old), Mircea Eliade pointed out the idea which was to become his lifelong credo:

As a matter of fact, **nearly all I write is personal**; even when I write scientific books. For me, the entirety of culture has to be personal, visceral..., because at the basis of any cultural organism there is an irrational intuition **which cannot be observed, which can neither be deduced nor co-ordinated, which cannot be transmitted through others' experience or learned.**⁴³

(De altfel, **cam tot ce scriu este personal**; chiar când scriu lucrări științifice. Pentru mine, întreaga cultură trebuie să fie personală, viscerală... , pentru că la baza oricărui organism cultural există o intuiție irațională care nu se poate observa, nu se poate deduce nici coordona, nu poate fi transmisă prin experiența altora, nu poate fi învățată.)

⁴³ Aurel Sasu & Mariana Vartig, Romanul românesc în interviuri - O istorie autobiografică, vol. II (Bucharest, Ed. Minerva, 1985), p.887. The highlighting is mine.

MIORITA

Motto: ... we have reasons to believe that the space where Zalmoxis, Orpheus and the Mysteries of *Miorița* and *Master Manole* appeared, did not exhaust its sources of creation: there, where Death is turned into a Wedding, the spiritual sources are intact.

(Mircea Eliade, *Arta de a muri*, p.75)

Anyone wishing to analyse the essential Romanian myths has to consider the ballad *Miorița* (Trans. 'The Ewe Lamb') because this particular folkloric creation is envisaged as an 'archetype of Romanian (popular) spirituality'¹ (even if the creation is spread on a geographical area that goes beyond the national borders). Eliade tackled this subject from folkloric, religious and philosophical angles. He also used - in a sublimated way - the conclusions derived from his theoretical demonstrations in his literary masterpiece, the novel *The Forbidden Forest*. In order to understand the references - made by Eliade in his novel - to this ballad, *Miorița* should be first examined in the light of those particular aspects that the Historian of Religions put in evidence in his scientific approach. The most widespread variant of this creation is the one that the poet Vasile Alecsandri published in the magazine *Bucovina*, in 1850. The ballad is about three shepherds (from three different provinces of the country) gathered together at a pen. Two of them plan to kill the Moldavian shepherd, who surpasses them in many ways: he is rich, handsome and brave. But the Moldavian herder has got

¹Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis...*, p.238.

in his flock a sheep with oracular powers and human voice. She reveals to him his companions' plot. Facing the possibility of his death, the shepherd makes his testament, asking the ewe lamb to tell his murderers where and how to bury him and to let his mother know that he disappeared because he married a beautiful Queen, 'the World's Bride'. The wedding is projected to a cosmic level: Sun and Moon play the role of Godfather and Godmother, mountains are priests, trees and birds the invitees at the ceremony and the place of the candles is taken by the stars.

Mircea Eliade rightly notices that the ballad represents in the Romanian culture, 'at the same time, a problem of folklore and history of popular spirituality and a central chapter in the history of ideas' ('reprezintă pentru cultura românească, în același timp o problemă de folclor și de istorie a spiritualității populare și un capitol central în istoria ideilor.')². In order to prove this, he quoted different interpretations given by folklorists (Constantin Brăiloiu, Fochi), a sociologist (H.H. Stahl), a philosopher (Lucian Blaga), and finally expressed his own view on this archaic, pre-Christian ballad. All the researchers since Fochi³ have adopted this one's division of the ballad into four main episodes: **I) the epic, initial background; II) the oracular sheep; III) the shepherd's will** (by word of mouth); **IV) the old mother**. From these divisions, the third sequence is common to all the regions of the country and consequently is the *sine qua non* part of the ballad. It was also said that, probably, *Miorița* resulted from the transmutation of a primarily ritual behaviour into a poetical masterpiece, with a more elevated message⁴. Eliade comments on Brăiloiu's conclusions and

²Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis...*, p.227.

³See Eliade, *ibid.*, p.241.

⁴See H.H. Stahl and Constantin Brăiloiu in Eliade, *ibid.*, p. 223.

highlights the essentialness of two folkloric motifs of the ballad: **1) Death assimilated to a Wedding** (archaic theme with roots in prehistory) and **2) the substitution of the popular funerary elements by cosmic objects**⁵. We do not intent to repeat those elements proving the archaism of *Miorița* and we content ourselves with mentioning Eliade's conclusion that the origins of this poem are to be found in the religious universe (the epic nucleus of the ballad is present in the Romanian ritualistic songs)⁶. In an attempt at interpretation, the historian of religions focuses on the shepherd's attitude when faced with Death, an existential situation whose interpretation triggered a continuous debate among specialists⁷:

In the universe of the folkloric values, the attitude of the shepherd expresses a more profound existential decision: 'you cannot defend yourself against destiny as you do against your enemies'; you can only impose a new significance on the ineluctable consequences of a destiny ready to come true.⁸

(In universul valorilor folclorice, atitudinea păstorului exprimă o decizie existențială mai profundă: 'nu te poți apăra împotriva destinului cum te aperi împotriva dușmanului'; nu poți decât să impui o nouă semnificație consecințelor ineluctabile ale unui destin gata să se împlinească.)

If destiny itself cannot be changed, its significance can, and becomes also liable to ultimately overturn and annul the destiny, on a transcendent level. The shepherd transforms his death into a symbolic cosmic wedding. He is aware that he will die anyway one day, whether he defends himself this time or not and 'the cosmological values of symbols

⁵ibid., p.234.

⁶ibid., p.242.

⁷The resigned attitude of the herder was considered the expression of the Romanian soul *par excellence*. The debate between those who interpret the shepherd's attitude as pessimistic and those who adopt an optimistic view to explain his behaviour still continues.

⁸Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis...*, p.247.

enable him to leave behind the subjectivity of a situation and to recognise the objectivity of his personal experiences'⁹.

It is our view that *Miorița*, like *Zalmoxis*, is part of a larger frame of Romanian eschatological myths which teach the immortality of the soul and the necessity of the sacrifice. In a way, **the image of the Romanian shepherd is very close to the one of the Greek Iphigenia**. Innocent, they are both faced with the blows of a fate condemning them through some oracular powers (the sheep in the ballad; the seer Calchas in the Greek myth) and they both are confronted with a dual existential situation: the young man turns his death into a cosmic wedding (in agreement with Romanian custom), while Iphigenia is told to prepare not for her sacrifice, but for the wedding with Achilles. We think that searching for an optimistic or pessimistic interpretation of the herder's attitude towards the eventuality of his death is wrong (for both directions of analysis are equally valid) and the ballad remains an *opera aperta* that allows study from different angles.

In Eliade's novel The Forbidden Forest, the philosopher Biris adopts the same existential attitude as the young herder from *Miorița*. He is tortured to death by two of his former friends (the parallelism with the ballad is evident), who became police agents, in order to reveal a suspected secret political message. While in a transitory state between life and death, Biris transmutes his situation into an eschatological trial. In our opinion the verses opening the ballad 'In a blossomed valley / Threshold of paradise' ('Pe-un picior de plai / Pe-o gură de rai...'), which are repeated by Biriș in the novel, acquire the function of a mnemonic formula allowing the entrance into the Underworld. The agonising philosopher not only prepares himself for the ultimate passage, but

⁹Eliade, 'Methodological Remarks...', p.103.

discovers at the same time the mythical pattern of his situation: 'Oh God, they gathered to talk / And they started to plan / To kill at the sunset/ My Moldavian shepherd / Because he is braver...' ('Mări se vorbiră / Și se sfătuiră / Pe l-apus de soare / Ca să mi-l omoare / Pe cel moldovean / Că-i mai ortoman...')¹⁰. He continues to recite verses even under torture, mocking his inquisitors, who wanted to find out a certain political message: 'All messages begin like this: "In a blossomed valley / Threshold of paradise..." But they can't be deciphered if you haven't got the key.' ('Așa începe orice mesagiu: "Pe-un picior de plai, / pe-o gură de rai..." Dar nu poți să-l descifrezi dacă n-ai cheia.')¹¹. Those surrounding Biriș think he is delirious. In fact he discovered a way of defeating his own destiny, as repeating a mythical archetype automatically involves the abolition of profane time ('myth makes man once more exist in a timeless period, which is in effect an *illud tempus*, a time of dawn and of "paradise", outside history.'¹²). More precisely he annuls the *profane history* and enters that *exemplary history* towards which the archaic man used to turn in his crucial existential situations. By repeating an ancient paradigmatic situation, Biriș transfigures the meaning of his situation, the same way the shepherd from *Miorița* converts his death sentence into 'an enchanting and majestic wedding mystery, which in the end, allows him to triumph over his own destiny' ('Într-un mister al tainei nunții maiestuos și feeric care, în cele din urmă, îi permite să triumfe asupra propriului destin'.)¹³. Eliade discovered the liturgical origins of *Miorița* in his research and utilised them in *The Forbidden Forest*. For Biriș, the ballad's verses take the place of a liturgy and a last confession. Not surprisingly, the researchers also asserted that certain lines from *Miorița*,

¹⁰Verses from *Miorița*, quoted by Eliade in *Noaptea...*, vol. II (1991), p.333.

¹¹Eliade, *Noaptea...*, vol. II (1991), p.333.

¹²Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.430.

¹³Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis...*, p.248.

have originally had the function of a spell.¹⁴ Thus Eliade employs them in the novel, where their magic powers exorcise Biriş' death, by imaginarily transporting him from his profane condition (torture) to the fairy like *illud tempus* of the Romanian ballad. In our view the episode of the novel is linked to Nae Ionescu's ideas on religion, according to which pain can be turned into joy if it is taken as an initiatory phase towards the final liberation (we will discuss this topic in a separate chapter).

Another parallelism between the ballad and Eliade's novel is **the attention both heroes show towards their mothers** (in the novel Coana Viorica is like an adoptive mother as she brought the orphan Biris up). They both want to conceal the truth (death, torture) from these women they love and ease their pain by either the image of a wedding (ballad) or by untruly blaming a fatal illness for causing death (novel):

And please, don't let
My dear mother know
That at my wedding
A star fell; ...¹⁵

(Iar la cea măicuță
Să nu-i spui drăguță,
Că la nunta mea
A căzut o stea, ...)

(Miorita)

Tell what happens to Coana Viorica as well, but don't tell her directly. Don't let her know in what state you saw me. Don't frighten her. Tell her that I died of tuberculosis like my mother. This is the way my mother died, of tuberculosis. I was sentenced to death long before...¹⁶

(Să-i spui și Coanei Viorica, dar să nu-i spui așa. Să nu-i spui cum m-ai văzut. Să n-o sperii. Să-i spui c-a fost tuberculoza, ca și pe mama. Așa a murit și mama, de tuberculoză. Eu eram condamnat de mult...).

(The Forbidden Forest)

¹⁴It is Constantin Brailoiu ⁷ who discovered this feature of the verses. See Eliade, *ibid.*, p.235.

¹⁵As in other parts of the world, the fall of a star symbolises death in the Romanian popular tradition.

¹⁶Eliade, *Noaptea...*, vol.II (1991), p.342.

There is another episode in Eliade's novel, in which in our view, he makes use of the concept of a *mioritic attitude*, that is the sublimation of an unfortunate destiny into the dialectic **Death=Wedding**. The Forbidden Forest ends with the death of Ileana and Stefan, united by a love that transforms their accident into a matrimonial ceremony (Stefan keeps calling her 'my bride' during their final conversation and they both accept their death as the only way they could realise their union).

In his Diary, Eliade mentions his finding of a text from St Augustine (*Sermo Suppositus*, 120, 8) where Jesus' death is assimilated to a wedding¹⁷. The historian of religions wonders if this interpretation is Augustine's own creation or a general motif, in which case the symbolism of *Miorița* is liable to have Christian significations as well and consequently *the wedding assimilated to a death* cannot possibly be a Pagan motif, superficially Christianised¹⁸.

The two meanings become one in the Romanian ballad as well: Death is in fact a cosmic Wedding of the soul with the universe. The extensive utilisation of this myth in Eliade's literary masterpiece The Forbidden Forest lies in its characteristic of expressing the ultimate Romanian mentality:

Unconsciously, both the popular poets... and the intellectuals... felt a secret affinity between the shepherd's destiny and the one of the Romanian people. The *Mioritic* hero succeeded in finding a meaning to his unhappiness, assuming it not as a personal 'historical' event, but as a sacramental mystery. Consequently he imposed a sense on the Absurd itself, responding by a nuptial fairy scene to unhappiness and death.¹⁹

¹⁷'Like a bridegroom... Christ came on to the nuptial bed of the Cross, and climbing it, he consummated the marriage. And when he heard the sigh of the creature, he lovingly offered himself to torture, to spear his bride, thus uniting himself forever with the woman.' In Eliade, Jurnal..., vol. I, p.581.

¹⁸ibid., p.581.

¹⁹Eliade, De la Zalmoxis..., p.249.

(Inconștient, atât poezii populare... cât și intelectualii... simțeau o afinitate secretă între destinul pastorului și cel al poporului român. Eroul mioritic a reușit să găsească un sens nefericirii lui asumându-o (sic) nu ca pe un eveniment 'istoric' personal, ci ca pe un mister sacramental. El a impus deci un sens absurdului însuși, răspunzând printr-o feerie nupțială nefericirii și morții.)

YOUTH WITHOUT OLD AGE AND LIFE WITHOUT DEATH

Motto: All that comes into my memory from those times, all I could learn, and all I could forget as well, all I desired, I dreamt, remained inside me, not in my memory, but more profoundly, inside my Self. ... I was told that it would have been enough for a small electrode to enter a region of my brain, for a great part of my past to return into my memory, *up to the smallest details*. And if this would happen to me...

(Mircea Eliade, Fragments of Diary, Chicago, 19 Nov., 1977)

There is one myth that Mircea Eliade utilised more than any other myth in his literary writings: *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death*. This is in fact, the title of a Romanian fairy-tale (*'Tinerețe fără bătrânețe și viață fără de moarte'*), collected by the typographer and writer Petre Ispirescu, in 1838¹. It is not only for the richness of the myth itself that Eliade made use of it in his literary writings, but for the fact that this fairy-tale supports some of his own religious and philosophical theories as well: **the necessity of a journey and the return in order to reach the Self, the equivalence between forgetfulness and loss of Self, the definition of freedom** (the ability to live in different spaces and different times). The historian of religions specified in one of his articles that 'In no other Romanian myth are the universal and the ethnic, the human and the fantastic interwoven in a more fascinating way.' ('In nici un alt mit românesc nu se împletește mai fascinat universalul cu etnicul,

¹Published for the first time in the newspaper *Țăranul Român*, 1862, nr 11, Bucharest.

umanul cu fantasticul.’)². Although there are scholars who mentioned the link between this fairy-tale and Mircea Eliade’s fiction, this aspect has not yet been tackled in depth. For the purpose of our study we shall make first a summary of the fairy-tale *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death*.

The story goes that a king and a queen could not have children. They seek advice from an old man who gives them some special medicine. The queen becomes pregnant and everybody in the kingdom rejoices. But before the actual birth, the yet unborn child begins to cry loudly and he does not stop until his father promises him ‘Youth without Old Age and Life without Death’. A boy was born and, as years passed by, he proved to be intelligent and wise. When Prince Charming was fifteen, he asked his father for what he was promised and, at the king’s answer that he could not possibly offer the boy such a thing, he makes up his mind to search himself for ‘Youth without Old Age and Life without Death’. After successfully fighting two monsters, he reaches the forest and the castle where ‘Youth without Old Age and Life without Death’ is. From the three fairies living there, Prince Charming marries the youngest and lives in a perpetual youth and happiness. But while hunting a rabbit, he entered The Weeping Valley (Rom. ‘Valea Plângerii’) where the fairies forbade him to go. Suddenly he feels homesick. Despite all the warnings (that his parents died hundreds of years ago, as the duration was different in his land) he decides to return home. Gradually, on his way back, the Prince grows older and older. Once in the ruined palace of his childhood, tears in his eyes, he descends to the basement. All he finds there is an ancient trunk. From inside it, Death rose and slapped the Prince’s face, turning him into dust.

Three pivotal motifs in Eliade’s fictional writing could be also discovered in this myth: 1. **Journey = search for the Self**; 2. **Forgetfulness = loss of the Self**; 3. **Freedom = own choice of life, time, space**. In order to attain *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death*, Prince Charming has to make **a journey** and pass through some initiatory trials, like fighting monsters, and acquire wisdom through love and marriage. In our view his ideal is, in fact, the

²Eliade, ‘Mitul Generației Tinere’ in *Profetism...*, vol. II, p.109.

finding of his own Self, and his return home shows that The Prince is finally able to assume his mortal condition. As Heinrich Zimmer pointed out, 'there is a strange and constant fact that it is only after a ... journey to a distant region, in a strange land, a new country, that the meaning of the inner voice guiding our search can be revealed to us.'³. Similar to Prince Charming, Dominic Matei, the main character from Eliade's novella 'Youth without Youth'⁴ has to go abroad and overcome different trials: he has to change his identity, escape his followers, and understand the meaning of real love. Again, like Prince Charming from the fairy-tale, Dominic Matei forgets about his 'home', about his original life and loses his Self (' "Forgetting" is equivalent, on the one hand, to "sleep" and, on the other, to loss of the self, ...')⁵. The detail that the character from 'Youth without Youth' has a false passport, on a different identity, is significant, for he also feels 'foreign' to his Self:

³Quoted by Eliade, Symbolism..., p.94

⁴This is, in short, the content of the story:

An old teacher, Dominic Matei, is struck by lightning in Bucharest. He does not die following the accident, and the medics establish that he is in fact in the process of a very curious rejuvenation (instead of 70 he looks like a 30 year old). Moreover he acquires an exceptional universal memory, able to store the entire information of all times. This uncommon condition put him in conflict with the authorities and he leaves the country, disguised and with a false passport. After being under medical observation for a while, he succeeds in concealing his traces. Dominic lives for a brief period with a woman who could recollect her previous life, but because she starts to suffer a very rapid process of senescence because of him, he separates from her. When Dominic reaches the age of 100 years, he discovers an old photo album from his childhood and decides to return to Piatra-Neamt (his native city). Next day he is found frozen to death in front of his childhood home. His death looked suspect to the others as the body was dressed in too large clothes and, although looking very old, he had a Swiss passport belonging to a 32 year old man.

⁵Eliade, Myth and Reality, p.116.

... he had the impression that everything happening to him was not *truly* related to him and it was about something else, *somebody else*.

'Try to describe as precisely as you can and with as many details as possible what you really want to say when you say: "*somebody else*"', the Professor interrupted him once. 'In what sense do you feel *foreign*? Hadn't you already 'installed' yourself in your new condition?'⁶

(... i se părea că tot ce se întâmplă de la o vreme nu-l privește *cu adevărat*, că e vorba de altceva, de *altcineva*.

'Încearca să descrii cât mai precis și cu cât mai multe detalii ce vrei să spui când spui: "*altcineva*"', îl întrerupse odată profesorul. 'În ce sens te simți *străin*? Nu te-ai 'instalat' încă în noua dumitale situație?')

The real Centre resides not in another place, another country, but inside the Self. The 'everlasting youth' of the character, like the everlasting life of the Wandering Jew, becomes equivalent to the loss of *the real way*, to an endless wandering into labyrinth of a 'foreign life'. 'The sacrilege of *not having remembered* is logically expiated by *remembering with special intensity*'⁷, and while the myth's hero remembers his parents' castle by entering *The Weeping Valley*, the character from the novella recollects his *real life* only when he discovers an old album with photos (the first photo he sees is his childhood house from Romania). In order to express the intensity of Dominic's remembrance Eliade employs here one of the most poetical ideas of his entire fiction: **the epiphany of the roses**. In one of his conversations with his own Double, Dominic learns at some point, that he does not only have an extraordinary memory, but concepts become reality in that particular moment when he thinks of them. To prove this to himself, the former Latin teacher thinks of three roses and two brightly red roses appear suddenly, one in his hand and one on his knees. When his Double questions him where he wants the third rose to be put, Dominic

⁶Eliade, *Tinerețe fără de tinerețe* in *În Curte...*, pp.552-53.

⁷In Eliade, *Myth and Reality...*, p.107.

postpones the answer. Only later in the story, when he opens his photo-album from Romania, the thought comes again:

He remained undecided for some time, with the album in his hand. *What about the last rose ?* he heard himself thinking. Where do you want me to put it ? Leave the album and show me where you want me to put the rose. *The third rose...*

Vexed, he began to laugh bitterly. 'I nevertheless am a free man', he said to himself... . With great care and emotion, he opened the album. A freshly picked up rose, mauve, as he had only once seen before, greeted him in the middle of the page. He took it happily. He couldn't believe that a rose alone could fragrance a whole room. Afterwards he put it next to him... and fixed his gaze upon the first photo. It was pale, discoloured, foggy, but he recognised without difficulty his native home from Piatra-Neamţ.⁸

(Rămase câțva timp nehotărât, cu albumul în mână. *Și al treilea trandafir?* se auzi gândind. Unde vrei să-l pun ? Lasă albumul, și arată-mi unde vrei să pun trandafirul. *Al treilea trandafir...*

Incepu să râdă amar, contrariat. 'Sunt totuși, un om liber,...' . Cu mare grijă și emoție, deschise albumul. Un trandafir proaspăt cules, mov, așa cum nu mai văzuse decât o singură dată până atunci, îl întâmpină în mijlocul paginii. Il luă în mână, fericit. Nu putea crede că un singur trandafir putea îmbălsăma o cameră întreagă. ... Apoi îl așează lângă el..., și-și opri privirile asupra primei fotografii. Era palidă, decolorată, aburită, dar recunoscuse fără greutate casa părintească din Piatra Neamț.)

The roses are epiphanies 'signalling' the path towards the Self. The fact that the last one was purple, and not red like the others, heralds the finding of Perfection, real Centre and ultimately, Death. As in the myth, **'forgetting'** means **'dying'**. It is the lack of synchronicity between the type of duration in which the heroes (Prince Charming, Dominic Matei) live and the type of their beloved ones that highlights the identity between 'everlasting youth' and death. Only finally do they realise the simple truth that their desire to return is symbolically translated into a desire to die, as this is the only way to be reunited, on another existential level, with their Self (lost with the others' disappearance). The double symbolism is evident: 'that of Death which is the end of a

⁸Eliade, 'Tinerețe fără de tinerețe' in *În Curte...*, p.612.

temporal existence, and consequently, the end of Time - and the symbolism of the return to the germinal modality which precedes all form and all temporal existence.”⁹ In fact, neither character (either from myth or short-story) searches for *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death*, but for **freedom**, in the Eliadean sense of the word: the liberty to change not only geographical co-ordinates, cultures, environment, but times as well. This is what they cannot get. Prince Charming promises (to the fairies) to come back after seeing his parents’ castle and Dominic Matei (from the novella) has the illusion of **the choice** (to return to his country or not). He believes he can choose between one condition (eternal youth) or another (old age and death), as the voice of his Double suggests:

‘... you kept your freedom to accept or refuse this new condition. In the very instant in which... you would wish to reintegrate the other condition, you are free to do so...’

He breathed deeply. ‘So, I am free !’ he exclaimed after looking attentively around him. ‘I am free... But...’ But he didn’t dare to continue his thought.¹⁰

(‘... ți-ai păstrat libertatea de a accepta sau refuza această nouă condiție. În clipa când ... ai dori să reintegrezi cealaltă condiție, ești liber s-o faci...’

Respiră adânc. ‘Deci sunt *liber* !’ exclamă după ce privi cu atenție în jurul lui. ‘Sunt *liber*... Și totuși...’ Dar nu îndrăzni să-și continue gândul.)

The idea that Dominic did not dare to continue was the understanding that he acquired in fact ‘**half-freedom**’ and his liberty of choice is illusory.

In our opinion the Romanian myth of *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death* is not an expression of the universal idea of attaining immortality or youth¹¹, but is about the need to change times and lives,

⁹Eliade, *Symbolism...*, p.10.

¹⁰Eliade, ‘Tinerete fara de tinerete’, in *In Curte...*, p.573.

¹¹The hero **obtains** *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death*, but is not entirely happy with this condition.

to have different destinies (while preserving the Self) without the necessity of death as 'the roots of freedom must be sought in the depths of the psyché and not in the conditions created by certain historical moments;...' ¹². It is obvious that Mircea Eliade's novella is written on the structure of the fairy-tale *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death*. The common elements are numerous: both characters are 'chosen' by the destiny because of their exceptional qualities (Prince Charming is outstandingly wise; Dominic Matei wanted to acquire universal knowledge in his adolescence), they fall in love with equally out of the ordinary women, they both undertake a long, initiatory journey. We have chosen to discuss only three aspects (**journey = search of the Self; forgetfulness = loss of the Self; freedom = choice of time and space**) because they are relevant for Eliade's scientific and literary writings. Apart from the novella 'Youth without Youth', the writer constantly used this myth in short stories, other novellas ('A General's Uniforms', 'Les trois grâces', 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'), novels (The Forbidden Forest, Isabel and the Devil's Waters, The Return from Paradise), and articles ('About Youth and Old Age').

In 'Les trois grâces' he experiments with the idea of '**half-youth**' in a 'profane' context. Three old women suffering from terminal cancer are treated by a researcher with his newly discovered serum. As a consequence they are not only cured, but undergo a phenomenon of rejuvenation. In a dialogue between the Professor's friends, they underline the exceptional status of those who are liable to attain youth:

¹²Eliade, Symbolism..., p.4.

'... only the person who is threatened by the greatest danger, only that one stands, for the moment, the chance to get youth without old age..'.
'And life without death', he found himself adding, half joking.¹³

('... numai cel care e amenințat de cea mai gravă primejdie, numai el are, deocamdată, șansa de a dobândi tinerețea fără de bătrânețe...'
'Și viața fără de moarte', se trezi adăugând, pe jumătate în glumă..)

As a consequence of the treatment's interruption, the women are rejuvenated for half a year while re-becoming old for the remaining half. In this intermediate state we could detect a concentrated image of the human existential condition: youth-old age. Another woman who changes her ages in a spectacular way, is Marina, from 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'. If Dominic Matei ('Youth without Youth') enjoys his new condition primarily for his prodigious memory, the alternations in Marina's age allow her the love of a young man, called Darvari. Noticing the continuous metamorphosis of the woman, he assures her that he will continue to love her 'until beyond old age' ('până dincolo de bătrânețe')¹⁴. But after a passionate night, Darvari wakes up and seeing next to him a very old woman, runs away, scared. These transformations in Marina's appearance were part of a trial's initiatory scenario. As a magic woman herself she was not seeking an ordinary love (in which the physical aspect predominates), but the ultimate spiritual love, beyond biological age, life and death. In 'A General's Uniforms' *Youth without Old Age* is considered the appanage of the artistic condition and is envisaged as a *curse*. Growing old becomes impossible as long as the actor changes the ages, with the help of memory or imagination. Ieronim explains this to his uncle:

¹³Eliade, 'Les trois grâces', in *In Curte...*, p.325.

¹⁴Eliade, 'Pe Strada Mântuleasa', in *In Curte...*, p.290.

'An artist never grows old... If God punished us with something, I e punished us with youth without old age. I admit, the punishment is harsh, but what can we do ? This is our fate...'

'Youth without old age', repeated Antim smiling.¹⁵

('Un artist nu îmbătrânește niciodată... Dacă ne-a pedepsit și pe noi Dumnezeu cu ceva, ne-a pedepsit cu tinerețe fără de bătrânețe. Recunosc, pedeapsa e grea, dar ce putem face ? Asta ne-a fost ursita...')

'Tinerețe fără de bătrânețe', repetă Antim zâmbind.)

In The Forbidden Forest the myth of *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death* shapes - in a 'camouflaged' way - the destiny of the main character, Ștefan. Although married, he falls for another woman, Ileana¹⁶, and searches for her twelve years, in different countries, while undergoing several initiatory trials. In a dialogue with another heroine, Miss Zissu, Ștefan identifies his destiny with the one of the king's son, from the Romanian fairy-tale:

'I do not want to grow old, to have my soul mineralised, and one day, die. I want to live for ever, young, like in our fairy-tale *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death*. I think I have this right: to ask for my share of immortality...'
'Immortality of the soul !' exclaimed, nearly sad, Miss Zissu. 'We are all immortals. But we have to die first !...'¹⁷

('Nu vreau să îmbătrânesc, să mă mineralizez sufletește, și într-o bună zi să mor. Vreau să trăiesc de-a pururi, tânăr, ca în basmul nostru *Tinerețe fără bătrânețe și viață fără de moarte*. Cred că am acest drept: de a-mi cere partea mea de nemurire...') 'Nemurirea sufletului !' exclamă aproape întristată d-ra Zissu. 'Toți suntem nemuritori. Dar trebuie să murim întâi !...')

When he finally finds Ileana, the woman he really loves, Ștefan realises that in fact, he searched for his own liberation which could be accomplished only through their death, together. Playing the function of the native castle from the myth, Ileana represents the poliedronic image of : **Death - Centre- Self - Home**.

¹⁵Eliade, 'Uniforme de General', In Curte..., p.448.

¹⁶Ileana is a name usually used for fairies in the Romanian myths.

¹⁷Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. II (1991), p.49.

In his early novel Isabel and the Devil's Waters, Eliade entitled the first chapter 'Youth without Old Age' and the last one '...And Life without Death', suggesting a cyclical organisation of the writing, moulded on the structure of the Romanian myth. The similar pattern is evident: **exceptional hero - initiatory journey - trials - love - death**. In the beginning of the book, the main character, nicknamed 'the Doctor', has a dialogue with Fraulein Roth, a dialogue which opens a series of spiritual and physical adventures:

'Why don't you know Romanian ? I would ^{have told} you a beautiful story: Tinerete fara batranete... That's all. I shan't translate the title for you. Let me write down in your book... these words only. You can look them up in the dictionary. But listen how suggestive they are: Ti-ne-re-te...' 'Ti-neu-re-dze... Doctor, you are sentimental.'¹⁸

('De ce nu ştii româneşte ? Ji-aş povesti o poveste frumoasă: Tinereţe fără bătrâneţe... Atât. Nu-ţi traduc titlul. Lasă-mă să scriu în carnetul d-tale... numai aceste cuvinte. Le poţi căuta în dicţionar. Dar ascultă ce mult spun: Ti-ne-re-ţe...' 'Ti-neu-re-tze... Doctore, eşti sentimental.')

The hero's decision not to return from India to his country is symbolically equivalent to a death. His liberty resides in his power to choose and he remains there to dedicate his life to Isabel's child. His new found Self is represented by this child who, although destroying his spiritual life, continues him *in abstracto*. Between spiritual accomplishment (= youth without old age) and the common 'eternal life' accessible to everyone through their offspring (= life without death) the Doctor chooses the second: 'Briefly: refusing youth without old age, I pine for life without death, and I marry Isabel. Marriage being the transcendental link, - is immortal - in heaven. And upon the earth, I will live through my children, for ever.' ('Pe scurt: refuzând tinereţea

¹⁸Eliade, Isabel..., p.8.

fără de bătrânețe, tânjesc viața fără de moarte, și mă căsătoresc cu Isabel. Căsătoria fiind legătura transcedentală (sic), e nemuritoare în cer. Iar pe pământ, voi trăi prin fiii mei, în veacuri.')¹⁹.

Eliade took a totally different angle on the myth in the novel The Return from Paradise. The notion of *Youth without Old Age* becomes ground for existential questions. After participating in a street confrontation between left-wing workers and the police forces, the young, well-off Emilian expresses his feelings in a delirious monologue:

... I feel I grow old...

And if you are old, you see life in a different way. An old man is an old man, it doesn't matter what you say. ...my body still remains young and my spirit is young as well. But something enters me, something old,... . Because the main question is this: how can you feel something you are not, something which maybe, you won't ever become...²⁰

(... Simt cum îmbătrânesc...

Și dacă ești bătrân, altfel ai să privești viața. Un bătrân e un bătrân, orice ai spune. ...trupul tot tânăr îmi rămâne, și spiritul tot tânăr. Dar *intră* ceva în mine care e bătrân,...

Pentru că toată întrebarea aicea stă: cum de se poate să te simți ceva care nu ești, ceva care, poate, n-ai să devii niciodată...)

The shooting encountered during the demonstration had released the trigger of Emilian's consciousness. Through a violent experience, he finds his Self. This character expresses Eliade's philosophy at the time: in order to attain real freedom, any experience should be encouraged up to its end.

In his article 'The Myth of the Young Generation', Eliade wrote: 'To love, respect, believe in youth - is so natural a thing that it doesn't even have to be justified.' ('A iubi, a respecta, a crede în tinerețe - este un

¹⁹ibid., p. 148.

²⁰Eliade, Intoarcerea...(1992), pp.281-82.

lucru atât de firesc încât nici nu mai trebuie justificat').²¹ As youth is 'the eternal source of all human experience'²², the young journalist and essayist Eliade promotes the idea of a cultural spiritual rejuvenation, in conformity with the myth:

Youth is the only stage of human life when the individual could really get in contact with myth. It does not matter how many of them achieve this contact in a concrete way, how many of them obtain the 'Youth without Old Age'. The fact that they endeavour and pine for this myth is the important thing. And in this burning with desire lies their chance to later fertilise history and culture.²³

(Tinerețea e singura etapă din viața umană când insul poate într-adevăr obține contactul cu mitul. Nu interesează câți tineri realizează concret acest contact, câți dintre ei obțin 'tinerețea fără bătrânețe'. Interesează faptul că se străduiesc și ard pentru acest mit. Și în această ardere stau șansele lor de a fertiliza, mai târziu, istoria și cultura.)

In one of his essays from the volume Oceanography, Eliade finally reconciles the two biological states in an integrative vision of life. His ultimate idea of freedom is composed by their complementarity, a necessary equilibrium for escaping the *terror of Time*:

If you know how to make from one hour, both youth and old age, then you will not be scared anymore by either of them. When neither mediocrity, nor perfection, neither error, nor certitude interest you any longer - then you have liberated yourself from these destinies, because you remain yourself only, without old age and without death. I often think of our fairy-tale 'Youth without Old Age and Life without Death'. Are not these myths representing the central drama of a civilisation ?²⁴

²¹Eliade, 'Mitul Generatiei Tinere' in Profetism..., vol. II, p.107.

²²ibid., p.111.

²³ibid., p.113.

²⁴Eliade, Drumul..., p.55.

(Dacă știi să faci dintr-un singur ceas și tinerețe și bătrânețe, apoi nu mai ai nici o teamă, de nici una din ele. Când nici mediocritatea, nici perfecțiunea, nici eroarea, nici certitudinea nu te mai interesează - te-ai eliberat de aceste destine, pentru că ai rămas numai tu însuși, fără bătrânețe și fără de moarte. Mă gândesc adesea la acel basm al nostru cu 'tinerețe fără bătrânețe și bătrânețe (sic) fără de moarte'. Oare miturile acestea nu reprezintă drama centrală a unei civilizații ?)

Assessing Eliade's interpretations of the myth *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death* in his fiction, one can say that he 'played' with it in an almost mathematical way. In some writings the hero chooses to **return home** as in the myth (e.g. 'Youth without Youth'), in others he decides to **remain in a foreign place** (e.g. Isabel and the Devil's Waters), or there is a **balance** between the two worlds ('Les trois grâces', The Return from Paradise, The Forbidden Forest). But the common denominator of these writings is that the characters under the sign of this myth finally find their own Self which is triggered by different symbols: a **purple rose** ('Youth without Youth'), a **child** (Isabel and the Devil's Waters), a **gun** (The Return from Paradise), a **woman** (The Forbidden Forest). All these symbols of the Self imply death under one form or another, but death as a synonym for freedom. It is our opinion that Eliade discovered in the Romanian myth *Youth without Old Age and Life without Death* a pattern for expressing, in varied ways, his remarkable concept of freedom.

THEMES, SYMBOLS, IMAGES

A PLANT CALLED 'MĂTRĂGUNA' (*'DEADLY NIGHTSHADE'*)

Motto: Good evening, deadly nightshade... . You who are the queen of the skies and storms, you who are the queen of flowers It is you whom I call and beg, ...

(Incantation discovered by Simeon Manguica, quoted by Mircea Eliade in De la Zalmoxis la Genghis-Han, p.217)

The botanical preoccupation of the adolescent Eliade crystallised later in his studies in the symbolism of the plant called *deadly nightshade* (or *mandrake*), whose Romanian variety is known by the popular name of *mătrăgună* (the scientific name is *Atropa Belladonna*). As the historian of religions remarked: 'From all the plants searched for because of their magical and medicinal virtues by the Romanian witches, young girls and women, there is no other one whose ritual of gathering has so many "dramatic" elements as the deadly nightshade.' ('Dintre toate plantele pe care vrăjitoarele, fete și femei din Romania, le caută pentru virtuțile lor magice sau medicinale, nu există nici una al cărei ritual al culesului să comporte atâtea elemente "dramatice" ca mătrăguna.')

¹ In his analysis of the *mandrake*, Eliade pointed out certain characteristics of the plant's symbolism which are relevant to our hermeneutic: **1) the deadly nightshade is an erotic plant par excellence**: it brings love, marriage and fecundity; **2) picking it up constitutes a ritual** (remoteness,

¹Eliade, De la Zalmoxis..., p.206.

solitude and secret are essential; the scenario supposes a dance of naked girls around the plant); **3) its gathering is always associated with magical gestures and precautions** (it has to be full moon, the plant is personified as 'Great Lady', 'Queen', 'Good Mother'); **4) mărăguna has got dual power: its forces could be led towards Good or Evil / love or hatred**; and finally **5) it is feared and respected** because of its unique qualities which 'could multiply life or kill it'². These elements scrutinised by the folklorist Eliade, could be encountered, in a 'camouflaged' literary form, in his own novella: 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'. Oana, the giant girl, beautiful like a statue, performs the ritual of picking *matraguna* up for love and marriage. Describing this episode, Eliade respected the gathering schema from the popular tradition:

It was moonlight... . Oana stopped at the edge of a forest glade, she took her dress off and remained naked. She first knelt and searched for something among the weeds. Afterwards she raised up and started dancing, whirling in circle, singing and murmuring. ... 'Matraguna..., good lady, marry me in one month time!'...'³

(Era lună... . Oana s-a oprit la marginea unui luminiș, și-a tras rochia de pe ea și-a rămas goală. A îngenunchiat întâi și a căutat ceva între buruieni, apoi s-a ridicat și a început să dănuiască învârtindu-se în cerc, cântând și murmurând. ... 'Mărăgună..., doamnă bună, mărită-mă într-o lună!'...')

The main sequences of the genuine custom of picking up *deadly nightshade* **for erotic purposes** could be discovered in the text: the presence of **full moon**, **seclusion**, **nakedness** (with magical implications), kneeling as a sign of **respect**, **circular dance** (Eliade showed that this is reminiscent of a ritual dance), **incantations** in

²ibid., pp.221-22.

³Eliade, 'Pe strada Mântuleasa' in În Curte..., p.234. The underlining is mine.

which the plant is personified. But Eliade introduced in his novella an original element, of a fantastic nature: the apparition of the spirit of *Mătrăguna* herself. In this episode, she reproves Oana for wanting to begin her sexual life too early. As the narrative is structured on the mythical, ritualistic scheme which envisages **the double sided aspect** of the plant (endowed with opposite powers: good or bad, love or death), the spirit of the plant is described as an **old and threatening woman**. She looks like a witch, is dressed in rags, but wears a necklace of golden coins⁴ (she is **at the same time poor and rich**), **unplaited** (symbol of magical nudity) and she has **oracular powers**:

... suddenly an apparition rose from the weeds, looking like an old woman, dressed in rags, unplaited and wearing a necklace of golden coins, and she lunged threateningly at Oana: 'Hold on you, fool ! the old woman shouted at her. Hold on, you are not even fourteen years old!'... Oana kneeled and bent her head. 'Calm down, continued the old woman. I cannot absolve you from your fate. When you feel you cannot live anymore without marriage, go to the mountains, because it is from there that your husband will come. ...'⁵

(... dintre buruieni s-a ridicat o arătare ca un fel de femeie bătrână îmbrăcată în zdrențe, despletită și cu o salbă de aur la gât, și s-a repezit amenințătoare spre Oana: 'Ho nebuno ! i-a strigat bătrâna. Ho că n-ai împlinit încă paisprezece ani !'... Oana a căzut în genunchi și și-a plecat capul. 'Potolește-te, a continuat bătrâna. Că ce ți-a fost ursit, eu nu pot dezlega. Când ți-o fi și ți-o fi de măritiş, să te urci la munte, că de-acolo îți vine bărbat. ...')

The **fantastic side** is organically entwined with the **ritualistic one**, the first one ultimately becoming a consequence of the latter. Thus Eliade, preserved the original symbolism of *mandrake* as **enhancing the eros**. In the novella 'Miss Christina' the painter Egor admits that he is enchanted by the vampire Christina and he compares her attractiveness with *Atropa Belladonna's* forces:

⁴The necklace of golden coins is worn by peasant and Gypsy women (both categories related to magic) while gold in itself symbolises an occult, superior condition.

⁵Eliade, 'Pe Strada Mântuleasa' in *În Curte...*, pp. 234-35.

'But now I love you', moaned Egor. 'At the beginning I didn't want to love you, I was afraid of you ! But now I love you ! What did you give me drink, Christina ? What deadly nightshade do your lips yield ?!...' ⁶

('Dar acum te iubesc', gemu Egor. 'N-am vrut să te iubesc la început, mi-a fost frică de tine ! Dar acum te iubesc ! Ce mi-ai dat să beau, Christina ? Ce mătrăgună rodește din buzele tale ?!...')

The plant designates here femininity: Christina's kiss is like *mătrăguna*, a kind of sorcery, erotic and mortal at the same time. The *deadly nightshade* is, in Eliade's narrative, the emblem of the woman-sorceress, a charming and dangerous creature. In Nineteen Roses, Niculina, the actress, represents the archetypal Woman. The dialogue between her and Ieronim, the producer, highlights her attributes:

'Who made my coffee today ? This is to know what herbs you put in it: deadly nightshade or basil.'

'I made it', confessed Niculina smilingly. 'But why are you asking ? Can you feel the taste of *mătrăguna* in it ?'

'Oh! Circe, unsurpassed witch ! exclaimed jokingly Ieronim, ...'

('Cine mi-a făcut astăzi cafeaua ? Ca să știu ce ierburi mi-ați pus: mătrăgună sau busuioc ?')

'Eu am făcut-o, mărturisi Niculina zâbind. Dar de ce mă întrebi ? Se simte gustul mătrăgunei ?'

'Ah ! Circe, neîntrecută vrăjitoare ! exclamă în glumă Ieronim, ...')

In his early novel Work in Progress, Eliade transcribes from his Indian diary notes related to his studies of *Atropa Belladonna* in Asian botany and its fantastic interpretations. The plant's symbolic complexity shows its special status in the Oriental imagery: 'This plant, in Asian people's imagery, is worth a Taoist library. The symbol, ... the fantastic aspect of mandrake interests me' ('Planta asta, în închipuirea asiaticilor, prețuiește cât o bibliotecă taoistă. Simbolul,... fantastica mătrăgunei mă

⁶Eliade, Domnișoara..., vol. I, p.122.

⁷Eliade, Nouăsprezece..., p. 84.

interesează').⁸ With irony, the writer uses the symbolic equivalence of *deadly nightshade* with 'femininity', in order to show his preference for studying the meanings of the female principle embodied in the plant, rather than becoming erotically involved with Ruth, a mediocre young girl:

Ruth, my darling, you are the sweetest light-minded little woman, but you are not a woman. And this is what I need. And at this particular moment, not even that. Now I have an entire pharmacopoeia in my head and a crazy desire to decipher the deadly nightshade. I'm an abstract guy, believe me, Ruth...⁹

(Ruth, draga mea, ești cea mai delicioasă femeiușcă, dar nu ești o femeie. Și mie asta îmi trebuie. Iar acum nici atât. Acum am o întreagă farmacopeie în cap și o poftă nebună să descifrez mărăguna. Sunt un tip abstract, crede-mă Ruth...)

Eliade employed the symbol of mandrake in his fiction, in a **proper, ritualistic way** ('The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'), in a **metaphorical form** to express eroticism and femininity ('Miss Christina', *Nineteen Roses*) and in an **ironic way** (*Work in Progress*). Nevertheless, behind all these first meanings the blueprint of the historian of religions could be discovered, as *mărăguna* constitutes a symbol which proves his own theory of the 'circulation of the substance of life and sacred powers among the various bio-cosmic levels'¹⁰ (e.g.: moon - woman- earth), a circulation that could be directed to either enrich or destroy Man.

⁸Eliade, *Șantier...*, pp.149-50.

⁹ibid., p.150.

¹⁰Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.315.

SÂNZIENE OR MIDSUMMER DAY

Motto: Suddenly, back in time; Calcutta 1929. Afterwards unexpectedly, I feel again, on the roof of my mouth, the hot and very bitter taste of ashes of Midsummer Night.

(Mircea Eliade, Jurnal vol.I, p.185)

Before tackling the symbolism of Midsummer Day in Eliade's literature, we shall take a preliminary look at this motif in the Romanian mythology. The *Sânziene*¹ are fairies gifted with oracular powers who could trigger madness in people. They not only foretell the future, but bestow a different amount of luck on each mortal as well. The Midsummer's celebration takes place on St John the Baptist's Day (24th June, middle of the year) and the ritual appears to be organised under the sign of **Diana**, the **selenic Goddess** who **spends most of the time in a forest**. Eliade's novel, translated under the title of The Forbidden Forest (the original title in Romanian is: The Midsummer Night) has its structure organised around the motif of *Sânziene*. The plot of the book begins and ends on the 24th June, but between the first and the last date a period of 12 years elapses, suggesting the illusory quality of time (the cipher 12 suggests the duration of one year and thus the eternal 'beginning'). Like Diana - the selenic Goddess - Ileana (the main character of the novel) appears during the night in the forest of Băneasa

¹The etymology of the word *Sânziana* remains controversial. While in Micul dicționar enciclopedic it is considered to be derived from 'Sanctus Dies Johannes', Eliade (in De la Zalmoxis la Genghis-Han) suggests the contraction of the syntagm 'Diana Sancta din Sarmizegetusa' into *Sânziana* (<San(cta) Diana).

where she encounters a man, Ștefan Viziru, with whom she falls in love. Their relationship begins on the mythical background of the Midsummer Night, when 'the skies open':

Some say that this night, exactly at midnight, the skies open. I do not quite understand how they could open, but that is what they say: that on Midsummer Night the skies open. But probably they open only for those who know how to look at them...²

(Unii spun că în noaptea asta, exact la miezul nopții, se deschid cerurile. Nu prea înțeleg cum s-ar putea deschide, dar așa se spune: că în noaptea de Sânziene se deschid cerurile. Dar probabil că se deschid numai pentru cei care știu cum să le privească...)

The image of Ileana is moulded on the pattern of two Romanian mythical characters: **Iana Sânziana / Diana** ('a celestial selenic divinity')³ and **Ileana Cosânzeana** (a chthonic fairy of floral vegetation). Ileana takes from **Iana Sânziana / Diana**: **1) the selenian attribute**: Ștefan meets her during the night and Ileana represents a symbolic personification of the Midsummer Night itself (Rom. *Sânziene* is reminiscent of 'Sânziana'); **2) the link with vegetation**: the first and the last encounter between the two protagonists take place in a forest; **3) the miraculous powers of turning people mad** (Ștefan becomes, in a figurative way, a 'dianatic', possessed by Diana/Ileana and he searches for 12 years for her). From **Ileana Cosânzeana**, Ileana borrows the personality of 'sapiential, supernatural virgin, initiated in the beneficent magic'⁴. If the image of the mythical Ileana Cosânzeana is always associated with **a fabulous horse** in the popular imagination, Ileana from The Forbidden Forest is permanently linked by Ștefan with

²Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. I, p.6.

³Kernbach, Dicționar..., p.548.

⁴ibid., p.244.

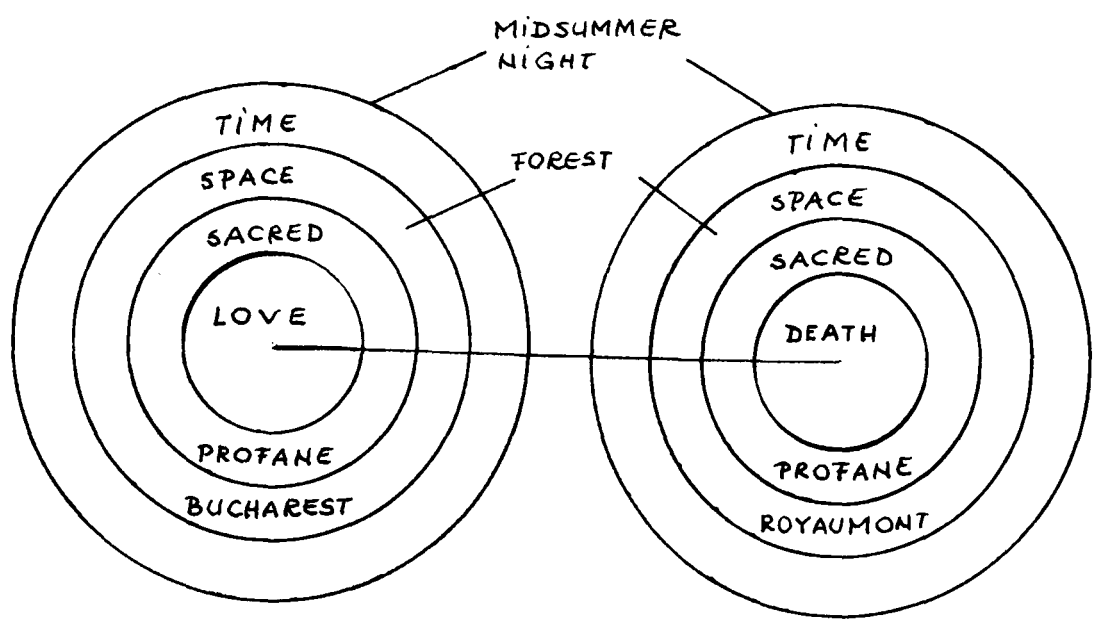
an imaginary car, a symbolic equivalent of the horse. In Ștefan's mind, the vehicle takes different forms (an old cab engrossed in snow, under the diffused light of a street lamp, a car painted on a canvas, etc.) and when it appears in reality, the automobile proves to be a vehicle of Wedding-Death. Ileana Cosânzeana, from the Romanian folklore, is also a 'fairy who flies in a magic way' and 'lives in the nether world' which could be reached through a dark tunnel at the edge of the world'.⁵ In other words she is an ethereal image of Death. The image of Ileana from Eliade's novel is also charged with eschatological significances. She is linked to the Midsummer Night which accomplishes the dual function of a beginning and an ending at the same time. By meeting Ileana, Ștefan begins a new life⁶ and embarks on a journey leading to his final liberation. For this he has to free himself from Măyă, the cosmic illusion, which binds him to his family. Like her mythical counterpart (Ileana Cosânzeana), Ileana is the one who leads him to the nether world, an equivalent of transcendence. Death is identified with Love and this made us consider the book's plot as being organised on two superimposed circles: one starting on a Midsummer Night, in a wood just outside Bucharest; the other commencing on a Midsummer Night in the forest of Royaumont⁷. The first circle has Love (the first meeting of Ileana and Ștefan) as a departure point, while the second sets off with Death (the last meeting of the two characters). Through superimposition, the two circles become one, thus suggesting the abolition of any rules or distinctions. Consequently we assist at a dissolution of the spatial dimension

⁵ibid., p.244.

⁶The protagonists meet on St John the Baptist's Day (=Midsummer Day) and the main signification of the baptism is death for the profane world and rebirth into the sacred one.

⁷The eschatological significance of the word is evident: Royaume(=Kingdom) / mont(=mountain).

(Romania = France; Băneasa = Royaumont), a disappearance of the temporal quality (the past turns into present through the 'eternal' characteristic of the Midsummer Night which, paradoxically being a date and its own negation, unites in a symbolic way the twelve year period), the identity of love with death and of sacred with profane (during the Midsummer Night the skies open and both dimensions: sacred / profane are present). The schema below exemplifies the two circles:



In the short story 'Les trois grâces' the symbolism of the Midsummer Day provides one of the many keys capable of decoding the plot. The medical doctor Aurelian Tătaru arranges an encounter with two of his old friends, in Poiana Dornei, in June. Exactly on Midsummer's Day, he has a strange accident and dies. His last words were: 'Les trois grâces', an allusion to the three female patients whom he attempted to cure of cancer. In fact Tătaru invited his friends to let them know that he had found the secret of immortality, which presupposed death as a necessary stage. One of his friends tries to understand his last words: 'Furthermore maybe he wanted to tell us that death is an accomplishment, a perfect integration of all the high capabilities which

were bestowed on us.' ('Și poate a vrut să spună că moartea este o împlinire, o perfectă integrare a tuturor facultăților înalte cu care am fost dăruți.')⁸. Dying during the summer solstice changes all meanings into a liberation, because in this particular time of the year the 'door' towards the sacred is opened. In Eufrosina - his rejuvenated female patient - Aurelian Tătaru sees the image of Persephone herself, condemned to live half of the year in the world and half in the underworld (half a year young / half a year old). Without knowing it, she is the one who helps him acquire true freedom and immortality, by hastening his death.

In the novella 'Dayan', Midsummer Day plays the same crucial role: it is a date in which mixed love and death are liable to equate the 'real freedom'. The writing is about a mathematician, Orobete Constantin, nicknamed Dayan, who, during one miraculous day, meets the Wandering Jew. The latter, who corresponds to the *anima mundi*, guides the young man through different realms of existence. As Dayan searches for the ultimate equation of existence, he realises in his discussions with Ahashverus that, in fact, his first revelation was his childhood discovery of the Wandering Jew's story:

'The Wandering Jew ?!' I exclaimed. 'I read it, long time ago, in my grandparents' village...'

'At Strândari', interrupted the old man, 'you read it hidden in the communal granary, and you finished it exactly on Midsummer Night; you ran through the last page, in the last minute when the letters printed on the worst paper before the First World War could still be deciphered...'

⁸Eliade, 'Les trois grâces' in *In Curte...*, p.303.

⁹Eliade, 'Dayan' in *La umbra...*, vol. V, p.133.

('Iidovul Rătăcitor ?!' am exclamat. 'Eu l-am citit, demult, în satul bunicilor...' 'La Strândari', m-a întrerupt bătrânul, 'l-ai citit ascuns în hambarul comunal, și l-ai terminat chiar în seara de Sânziene, ai parcurs ultima pagină în ultimele minute când se mai puteau descifra literele imprimate pe cea mai proastă hârtie dinainte de primul război mondial...')

Midsummer Night represents time when miracles happen and revelations take place: its duration is sacred and equals the non-time in the profane world. Only then do mortals have the possibility of annulling their dimensions: direction, space and time, as well as acquiring freedom/immortality through love=death. The Wandering Jew becomes the emblem of the one who lives in a perpetual 'Midsummer Day', in a no-time / no-space condition and he confesses to Dayan: 'And when you'll be judged, all of you from these parts of the world, even if you are Christians, Jews, sceptics and non-believers, you'll all be judged according to what you understood from my story... .' ('Iar când veți fi judecați, toți din aceste părți ale lumii, fie că ați fost creștini, evrei sau sceptici și necredincioși, veți fi judecați prin ce-ați înțeles din povestea mea... .')¹⁰. The role played by Ileana in The Forbidden Forest, or by Eufrosina in 'Les trois grâces', is taken in the novella 'Dayan' by Madonna Intelligenza, the symbol of universal Wisdom, a sublimated image of Virgin - Mother - Lover. Kept in a hospital for nervous diseases by the authorities, Dayan is conscious of the fact that his only chance left to attain freedom is to die on Midsummer's Day. Miracles are possible then and he could enter transcendency, as the 'prisons' man invented for himself (space-time-speed) are abolished. The mathematician loses the notion of time, and he obsessively asks the others not the actual date, but how long is left until the summer solstice: 'I just want to know if we are *before* or *after* the summer solstice, Midsummer Night.' ('Vreau doar să știu dacă suntem *înainte* sau

¹⁰ibid., p.141/

după solstițiul de vară, de Sânziene.’)¹¹; ‘So, there are three days left until the summer solstice, until Midsummer’s Night, continued Orobete... . That is, exactly 12 years since I finished reading *The Wandering Jew*... (‘Deci, trei zile până la solstițiul de vară, până la Sânziene, continuă Orobete... Adică exact 12 ani de când am încheiat lectura *Jidovului rătăcitor*... ’)¹². An equivalent of Midsummer Night is the image of **the room with a door set ajar**. Life is analogous to a room and during Midsummer Night, ‘the door ‘ is partially opened for those who understand and believe miracles. We could assert that, in fact, Midsummer Night brings forward a new soteriology. In our view, the symbolism of **the room with a door set ajar** could be integrated in the common series of Symplegades which present ‘the paradoxical passage from one mode of being to another, such as transfer from this world to another world, from the Earth to Heaven or Hell, or passage from a profane mode of existence to a spiritual existence’.¹³ In this context it is essential for Dayan to discover the ultimate equation in order to perceive the miracle of Midsummer Night, when the ‘door’ of life is ‘set ajar’. But as the sacred is powerful and dangerous, the full knowledge is given to the *initiates* only. Those who gain access to the sacred not only must be endowed with intelligence, but have to possess imagination as well: ‘One can pass through a Symplegade insofar as one is able to act “spiritually”, insofar as one proves that one possesses imagination and intelligence and, consequently, is capable of detaching oneself from immediate reality’¹⁴. Already initiated by Ahashverus, Dayan, the mathematician who reads poetry, awaits the Midsummer

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 166.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 173.

¹³ Mircea Eliade, ‘Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism’ in *The History of Religion - Essays in Methodology*, ed. by Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 101.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 101.

Night to start his definitive eschatological journey: 'I would prefer to reach the garden', he whispered. 'At this time, nobody is there. And it's Midsummer Night. Even in the heart of the capital, it remains what it was from the beginning: Midsummer Night...' ('Aș prefera să ajung în grădină', șopti. 'La ora asta nu mai e nimeni. Și e noaptea de Sânziene. Chiar în inima Capitalei, rămâne tot ce-a fost de la început: noaptea de Sânziene...')¹⁵. The concept of the Sacred's survival in an apparently Profane world epitomises the general theory lying at the basis of this narrative.

The summer solstice and Midsummer Night preserved a special significance for the private life of Mircea Eliade himself. In his autobiographical writings he identifies his own destiny of being exiled¹⁶ with the symbolism of Midsummer Night, a wandering through the existential labyrinth in search of a breach granting liberation. The Romanian motif of *Sânziene* evolves into the symbol of experience and continuity, of a personal quest for miracle in the contemporary, apparently 'desacralised' world:

I suddenly remember that exactly twenty years ago, during those terrible hot days in Calcutta, I wrote the chapter 'The Dream of a Summer Night' from *Isabel*. The same solstitial dream, with another structure and taking place at different levels, stands at the centre of *The Forbidden Forest*. Could it be a coincidence only? The myth and the symbol of the solstice continues to obsess me for very many years. But I had forgotten that it followed me since writing *Isabel*...¹⁷

¹⁵Eliade, 'Dayan' in *La umbra...*, vol. V, p.141.

¹⁶'Passing by, around ten o'clock, in front of the Trocadero, the snow which whitened the trees and covered the lawns, suddenly brought into my mind the winters from my country. I continue to be sad, But I know nothing can be done. The destiny of *the Midsummer Night*.' Eliade, *Jurnal...*, vol.I, p.242.

¹⁷*ibid.*, p.153.

(Imi aduc aminte că exact acum douăzeci de ani, pe teribilele călduri din Calcutta, scriam capitolul "Visul unei nopți de vară" din *Isabel*. Același vis solstițial, cu o altă structură și desfășurându-se pe alte niveluri se află și în centrul *Nopții de Sânziene*. Să fie oare numai o coincidență ? Mitul și simbolul solstițiului mă obsedează de foarte mulți ani. Uitasem, însă, că mă urmărea de la *Isabel*...)

A special 'date' with mythical implications, 24th June becomes the day when revelations and miracles happen: Love becomes Death and vice-versa, while Time-Space-Direction are abolished. By using the Romanian mythical motif of *Sânziene* in his fiction, Eliade obtained some of the most remarkable effects from his entire literature. Not only is his masterpiece entitled The Midsummer Night (The Forbidden Forest) but he admitted in his Autobiography a personal preference for this motif:

The summer solstice and Midsummer Night preserve, in my view, all the charms and all the prestiges. *Something happens* - and this day appears to me not only the longest one, but purely and simply *different* from the one from yesterday or the one from tomorrow.¹⁸

(Solstițiul de vară și noaptea de Sânziene își păstrează, pentru mine, toate farmecele și toate prestigiile. *Se întâmplă ceva* - și ziua aceasta mi se pare nu numai cea mai lungă, ci pur și simplu, alta decât cea de ieri sau cea de mâine.)

¹⁸ibid., p.150.

CĂLUȘARI - A ROMANIAN CATHARTIC DANCE

Motto: Whatever its origin, călușul, in its attested forms from the last centuries, is known in Romania only and could be considered a creation of the Romanian folkloric culture. What characterises it, is not only the archaism, but also its open structure... .

(Mircea Eliade, Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase, vol. III, p.224)

Analysing the structure of a religious idea or a 'sketch of popular theology'¹ not only sheds light upon Eliade's literary creations, but at the same time changes their perspectives and meanings. This is the case with the symbolism of the *calusari*² (Romanian cathartic dancers) which is present in the last novel written by Mircea Eliade: Nineteen Roses. The historian of religions considered the *calusari* 'a sort of secret society (Männerbund)'³ and he pointed out a set of rules lying at the basis of this cathartic ritual. Utilising his descriptions (Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses, Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions) we have assembled a system of seven essential aspects of the ritual, which also play a key-role in Mircea Eliade's fiction. *Calusarii* are a group of carefully selected young men who receive a highly sophisticated training. They have to 1) **learn dances, especially acrobatic ones that suggest the flight**. The initiation takes place in 2) **forests or deserted places**, outside villages. The *călușari* must 3) **strictly**

¹Eliade, Istoria..., vol. III, p.225.

²As Eliade showed, the name 'călușari' comes from the Romanian term for 'horse' ('cal' < Lat. Caballus).

³Eliade, Occultism..., pp.80-81.

respect a set of rules: keep secrecy, obey the leader, remain silent for a specific period of time. The origin of the dance is military, as suggested by 4) the vows, wooden swords, clubs with which the *călușari* are 'armed' and the symbolic flag they carry. The choreography consists of 5) performing dances which imitate, at the same time, 'fairies' flight (the patroness of the *călușari* is the 'Queen of Fairies' = *Doamna Zânelor*) and the gallop of horses. This way, '... the scenario actualised by the *calusari* consistently implies the merging of the opposite, though complementary, magico-religious ideas and techniques.'⁴ (We are also inclined to see in this tendency a reintegration of primordial androgyny). The main function of these ritual dances is 6) to cure the victims of the fairies. Some 7) burlesque scenes take place between each of two choreographic sequences, and their leading role is played by 'The Mute'. Apart from this character, there are four other actors representing typologies: a Priest, a Turk or Kazakh, a Doctor and a Woman. During the pantomime **all the actors try to make love to the Woman, one of the artists is killed and revived and the Woman becomes pregnant**. Revising the constitutive elements we could assert that the seven characteristics of the ritual are: 1) training for the performance of acrobatic / flying dances; 2) initiation in forests or deserted places; 3) respect for rules: secrecy, obedience towards leader, chastity, silence; 4) military origin of the ritual; 5) choreography imitating the fairies' flight and the horses' gallop; 6) ritualistic function: curing the victims of the fairies; 7) burlesque scenes loaded with a precise symbolism. Having this scheme we shall attempt to 'open' one of the reading levels of Eliade's novel Nineteen Roses. Eugen Simion resumes the plot of the book:

⁴ibid., p.84.

The technique of the novel follows, up to a point, the initiations of the central character (the writer Anghel D. Pandele), who, many decades ago, suffered a psychic traumatism and could not remember what happened one night, ... when he was accompanied by a young actress... Psychic traumatism or magic art ? This is the interrogation around which a labyrinthine history is organized... ⁵

(Tehnica romanului urmează, până la un punct, inițierile personajului central (scriitorul Anghel D. Pandele) care, cu multe decenii în urmă, a suferit un traumatism psihic și nu-și amintește ce s-a petrecut într-o noapte..., pe când se afla însoțit de o tânără actriță... Traumatism psihic sau act magic ? Este interogația în jurul căreia se concentrează o istorie labirintică... .)

A team of talented actors, under the leadership of Ieronim Thanase, perform the ritualistic function of the *călușari*. In a camp situated in a **deserted place** (that is, outside the profane space) they organise secret shows: plays, **archaic dances** and songs. Pandele is invited there and he is **cured** of his amnesia. Like the *călușari*, Ieronim's group of actors reedit the original function of the art as **healing ritual** with religious implications. The artists keep the **secrecy** of the entire initiation process of training. Some do not even divulge their roles in the play to their colleagues. All the team **obey** Ieronim, and one of them respects a **vow of silence**. Inviting his secretary (Eusebiu Damian) to join the camp, the writer Pandele sends one of the actors to collect him from the city. This man, foreign in appearance, is symbolically identical to **'The Mute'** from the *călușari* group: he is bound by a ritual of silence. Pandele introduces him over the phone to Eusebiu, by a direct analogy with **'The Mute'** from *călușari*:

⁵Eugen Simion, 'Postfata' in Eliade, *La umbra...*, vol. V, p.243.

But Pandeale... was the one who asked me from the beginning if I ever saw the Calusari dance.

'I didn't, but I know the play. That is I saw photos, I read about Calusari, I even saw some dances at the cinema.'

'So, you know', he impatiently interrupted me, 'that in every group there is a character who is not allowed to talk...'

'I know. He's called "The Mute" '.

'Exactly, The Mute.'⁶

(Dar Pandeale... m-a întrebat el de la început dacă am asistat vreodată la jocul Călușarilor.

'N-am asistat, dar cunosc jocul. Adică, am văzut fotografii, am citit despre Călușari, am văzut chiar câteva dansuri la cinematograful.'

'Știi, deci', m-a întrerupt nerăbdător, 'că în fiecare ceată se află un personaj care n-are voie să vorbească...'

'Știu. I se spune "Mutul" '.

'Exact, Mutul.')

The **military elements** of the ritual are 'camouflaged' in the novel under the form of plays with military subjects, treating Romanian historical events. In one of the representations, the formula 'torna, torna, fratre' (which appears in the first document preserved that attests the Latin origin of the Romanian people, VI century) is used with the function of a mantra triggering anamnesis. The actors repeat it in the voice of an ancient chorus and modify it into 'torna, ritorna, fratre'. This way they project the spectators centuries back into the past, when the Romans withdrew their troops from the territory of Dacia (Romania today). Attending these shows, Pandeale begins to **recover from his amnesia** and remembers that many years ago he made love (in a forester's house) with the so-called 'Euridice', the leading actress in a play he wrote. He also remembers that in the morning, before drinking some water, he saw at the window a blonde young woman who smiled and made him a sign to keep silent. She was clearly a fairy and her identity hints at the **'Queen of Fairies', the patroness of the calusari**: she takes people's minds (the mysterious 'woman' from

⁶Eliade, *Nouăsprezece...*, p.55.

the novel provoked Pandeale's loss of memory), she has no 'profane' identity (nobody knows who she is and how did she come in the forest) and asks for silence. As for Niculina, the actress with whom all the actors were in love, she could represent, in our opinion, the personification of **'the Woman'**, a character playing in the pantomimes accompanying the dances of *călușari*. Her predecessor was 'Euridice', the mother of Laurian (Niculina's fiancé) who **became pregnant** after the night spent with Pandeale, the writer. Following the hidden scenario of the ritual of *călușari* in Nineteen Roses, the amnesia ('forgetting' = 'dying') of Pandeale is analogous to the **death and revival** of one of the mimes in the cathartic dance. The whole scenario of the *călușari* ritual is transformed by Eliade in his novel into an eschatology / initiation, a new technique to acquire Freedom. In the last episode, Laurian, Niculina and Pandeale disappear in an old sledge pulled by horses (reminiscent of the combination of **fairies' flight** and the **gallop of horses** from the choreography of *calus*). The characters discovered a new soteriology, through spectacle, as art had *ab origine* a magic function. The ritual of the *călușari* is just one of the many superimposed levels of reading Nineteen Roses. The literary critic Eugen Simion wrote about a 'continuous provocation' of Eliade's reader by the author. The reader begins to look for *signs* and *myths* everywhere, making room for the idea of a vast link between the acts of existence: 'No thing is alone in universe, no happenings without a link to another initial and sacred happening...' ('Nici un lucru nu este singur în univers, nici o întâmplare nu este fără legătură cu altă întâmplare, inițială, sacră...').⁷ The fact that Eliade used the symbolism of the *călușari* in his very last novel, is significant. This archaic, pre-Christian scenario (which survived only in

⁷Simion, 'Postfață...', p.249.

Romania)⁸ whose elements are dispersed throughout Nineteen Roses enhances in an evident way the quality of *opera aperta* of Eliade's writing.

⁸Eliade, Occultism..., p.84.

INTERTWINING OF UNIVERSAL MYTHS AND MOTIFS

THE ARTIST AND HIS REFLECTIONS: DIONYSUS-ORPHEUS

Motto: Say, 'I am child of Earth and stormy Heaven;
 But my race is of Heaven (alone). This ye know yourselves.
 But I am parched with thirst and I perish. Give me quickly
 The cold water flowing forth from the lake of Memory.'
 And of themselves they will give thee to drink of the holy spring,
 And thereafter among the other heroes thou shalt have lordship.'

(Plate from Petelia, South Italy, fourth-third century B.C., in Mircea Eliade, Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World, p.358)

It can be said that the images of Dionysus, Orpheus and the mysteries constitute certain reference points for the Eliadean oeuvre, both scholarly and fictional. There are multiple grounds accounting for Eliade's particular interest in these themes. One of the methods to investigate them is to analyse the religious elements he used in his literary writings. Before employing this approach in the present chapter, we shall take a general look at the Dionysiac religion and Orphism, aiming to show the link between them. Eliade utilized in his narratives, those particular elements common to both mythological figures, whereby Dionysus and Orpheus become two reflected images, liable to converge at times, up until their identification.

THE DIONYSIAN RELIGION

According to Frazer the great preponderance of evidence points to Dionysus' Thracian origin¹. The majority of researchers agree in considering Dionysus to be a Thracian god, introduced in Greece either directly from Thracia or from Phrygia². There are many variants of the myth. The poet Nonnus³ wrote that Zeus visited Persephone under the form of a serpent and she gave birth to Zagreus-Dionysus. The babe mounted on his father's throne, mimicking the great god. But, while he was looking in a mirror, the Titans attacked him with knives. He tried to escape by taking various shapes (the likeness of Zeus, then Kronos, a young man, a lion, a horse, a serpent, a bull). In his final form he was caught and cut to pieces by the Titans.

In other texts⁴, Dionysus is son of Zeus and Princess Semele. Jealous, Hera tempts Semele to ask Zeus to see his real form, as god. The Princess is then stricken by his lightning and gives birth prematurely, but Zeus attaches the child to his thigh and after a while, Dionysus is born. Sometimes allusions are made to Dionysus' descent into Hades to bring up his mother, Semele, from the dead.⁵

A different version of the myth had the Titans approaching Dionysus and winning his trust with the help of some toys and ^amirror. Caught after his multiple, successive metamorphoses, the child is torn to pieces and eaten by his enemies. His heart only is saved and Zeus swallows it. Afterwards he has a sexual relationship with Semele and Dionysus is

¹James Frazer, The Golden Bough - A study in magic and religion (Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1993), p.387.

²Eliade, Istoria..., vol. I, p.352.

³Frazer, The Golden Bough..., p.388.

⁴Eliade, Istoria..., vol. I, p.352 and Morfologia Religiiilor - Prolegomene (Bucharest, Ed. 'Jurnalul literar', 1993), pp.68-69.

⁵Frazer, The Golden Bough..., p.389.

born again through her. (This particular variant forms the basis of Orphic theology.)

There are some elements that should be retained: Dionysus is the son of Zeus, he is killed and born again, he has thaumaturgic powers and incarnates Gods, people, animals. As Mircea Eliade highlighted, not only was Dionysus the son of Zeus, but his appearance in the religious history of Greece had the value of a spiritual revolution.⁶ Born of a mortal woman (Semele), Dionysus is a god and this fact symbolized to the ancient people the possibility of acceding to a transcendent way of being. More than anything else Dionysus became the image of the 'initiated' *par excellence* (all the elements of initiation are present: double birth, superior condition, death and descent into the underworld, his powers to transform different conditions), who acquired, through knowledge, a superior level, and was raised from human status, to divinity.

Dionysus was a deity of vegetation, the trees specific to him being the ones of an everlasting nature like: the pine tree, the fig tree or plants charged with sacredness such as the vine and corn. As god of vegetation and moon, he had 'a close connection... with suffering, death and resurrection, and with initiation.'⁷ The wine of Dionysiac orgies had a double function: to release the spirit from the cage of senses and to provoke that ecstasy normally accessible to Gods only. As Eliade showed, wine owed its potency to its corresponding celestial prototype:

Sacred inebriation makes it possible to share - though fleetingly and imperfectly - the divine mode of being; it achieves, in fact, the paradox of at once possessing the fullness of existence and becoming; of being at once dynamic and static.⁸

⁶Eliade, Patterns..., p.98.

⁷ibid., p.98.

⁸ibid., p.162.

In our opinion the wine also held the role of catalyst in creating the state of madness and frenzy that characterized those celebrating the Dionysus' cult. As the myth goes⁹, even after the god reaches manhood, Hera pursues him with hatred and causes him to go mad. He becomes a demented vagrant, but eventually, his sanity is restored by the mother goddess, Cybele. It is highly probable that those practising the cult of Dionysus assumed the temporary 'madness' of the god. (This stage towards a superior condition is strikingly similar to the 'madness' of the shamans who heal themselves, the curse in itself representing a sign of initiation.) The ultimate aim of the Dionysiac ecstasies was concentrated in a special feeling of freedom: 'you feel that you are no longer a man, no longer subject to laws, to prohibitions'.¹⁰

During the ritual, women and men were running to catch the sacrificial bull. They tore the flesh of the beast, eating the raw meat and trying to re-enact Dionysus' death by the Titans. In our view the omophagy helped them not only to re-live the mythical happening, but to acquire the characteristics of Dionysus (incarnated in a bull) as well. As a consequence they became prone to reincarnation, similar to the god. Eliade¹¹ saw in this episode a regression to a very archaic stage, even a pre-human one. He also puts forward the idea that the fall into the hunting animals' world could trigger an extremely creative psychological and spiritual shock. Eliade inferred that Dionysiac ecstasies were able to provoke a regression into a 'time' of pure zoology, that is project believers into a mythical Time, without beginning or end.

⁹See Michael Jordan, *Myths of the World - A Thematic Encyclopedia* (London, Kyle Cathie, 1995), p.85.

¹⁰Mircea Eliade, *No Souvenirs - Journal, 1957-1969* (New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), p.93.

¹¹Eliade, *Jurnal*, vol. I, p.359.

Another explanation of the ritual behaviour of those celebrating this cult is re-modelled in the Orphic beliefs. As Titans were the ancestors of mankind, people were thought of being intrinsically dual. They supposedly have a Titanic element, beastly, obscure, guilty for Dionysus' killing and a Dionysian element, divine and radiant, transmitted through the body of the god eaten by the ancestors.¹² The central role Dionysus played in the Greek religious life is due in main part to the multiplicity and creativity of meanings that can be derived from this myth. This characteristic was made evident by Eliade:

More than any other Greek gods, Dionysus amazes through... the novelty of his epiphanies, by the variety of his transformations. He is, certainly, the only Greek god who... amazes and attracts both the countrymen and the intellectual elites... . The drunkenness, the eroticism, the universal fertility, but also the experiences... triggered by the periodical coming of the dead people, or by *mania*, by the immersion into animal inconscience or by the ecstasy of an *enthousiasmos* - all these fears and revelations spring from a unique source; *the presence of god*.¹³

(Mai mult decât alți zei greci Dionysos uimește prin... noutatea epifaniilor sale, prin varietatea transformărilor sale... El este, cu siguranță, singurul zeu grec care... uimește și atrage atât pe țărani cât și elitele intelectuale... . Beția, erotismul, fertilitatea universală, dar și experiențele... provocate prin venirea periodică a morților, sau prin *mania*, prin scufundarea în inconștiența animală ori prin extazul unui *enthousiasmos* - toate aceste spaime și revelații țâșnesc dintr-o singură sursă; *prezența zeului*.)

THE ORPHIC MYSTERY

The most important cult derived from the Dionysian religion was the Orphism. The latter was also defined as being a religious current whose doctrine, apart from having deep roots in the Dionysiac religion,

¹²Eliade, Morfologia..., p.69.

¹³Eliade, Istoria..., vol. I, p.366.

belonged - according to tradition - to the mythical poet Orpheus. Not much is known about Orphism, but researchers agree on some points: rigorous **moral code**, a spiritualist vision of the **existence**, which is considered a **metempsychotic cycle**, and a mythological **reversed succession of the cosmogonic stages**¹⁴. Eliade makes a clear distinction¹⁵ between (1) the myths and fabulous traditions linked with Orpheus and (2) the ideas, beliefs and customs considered 'Orphic' in essence.

A highly paradoxical figure, Orpheus was considered by tradition a historical reality, a pre-Homeric poet and the prophet of Dionysus' cult. As Victor Kernbach¹⁶ pointed out, some Greeks thought Orpheus was a theologian, legislator-poet, musician, traveller and soldier, while others believed he was just an invented character. The legend situates him in Thrace, 'a generation before Homer', but on ceramics he is represented in Greek clothing.¹⁷ He had a complex personality, he was: king, healer and singer; he subdued animals of prey and Barbarians; he descended into the Underworld to bring Eurydice back to life and he was the alleged founder of the Mysteries. The episode of Orpheus' death is recorded in the fragments left from Aeschylus' lost drama, 'The Bassarids':

Orpheus used to climb every morning on mount Pangaios, to worship the sun, identified with Apollon; irritated, Dionysus sent the Maenads against him, the cithara-player was torn to pieces and his limbs scattered. His head, thrown into the river Hebron, floated singing up to Lesbos. Gathered with piety, the head was afterwards used as an oracle.¹⁸

¹⁴Kernbach, Dictionar..., p.442. The highlighting is mine.

¹⁵Eliade, Istoria..., vol. II, p.168.

¹⁶Kernbach, Dictionar..., p.445.

¹⁷Eliade, Istoria..., vol. II, p.168.

¹⁸ibid., p.168.

(Orfeu urca în fiecare dimineață pe muntele Pangaïos, ca să se închine soarelui, identificat cu Apollon; iritat, Dionysos a trimis împotriva lui menadele; citharedul a fost sfâșiat și măduarele sale împrăștiate. Capul lui, azvârlit în Hebron, a plutit cântând până la Lesbos. Cules cu evlavie, el a slujit apoi de oracol.)

After analysing the sources related to Orpheus, Mircea Eliade¹⁹ concludes that there are three ideas that predominate: **1) Orpheus is a religious character of an archaic type; 2) his prehistory and 'origin' are unknown, but they are not Mediterranean; 3) he is the founder of the Mysteries *par excellence*.** Orpheus created Orphism by giving new dimensions and meanings to the Dionysiac Mysteries. It was asserted²⁰ that he borrowed many elements from the Dionysiac religion, that he dogmatized them and introduced the journey into the Underworld (which had to be undertaken by the initiates through ecstasy).

In our opinion we have here a case of a remoulding of the Dionysian Mysteries into something more elaborate and metaphysical, through modifications in reverse and the emphasis on those very elements charged with an archaic, ritualistic significance. The episode of the child Dionysus being killed by the Titans could be equated to the more poetic descent of Orpheus to the Underworld; (the search for his lover, Eurydice is an element added *a posteriori*²¹); the Dionysiac orgy became Orphic katharsis; the multiple metamorphosis of Dionysus trying to evade his followers was converted into an elaborate theology of transmigration and immortality of the soul. And because the real difference was made by the written texts, *hieroi logoi* (on purification, life after death and poetry) attributed to Orpheus, we can say that Orpheus

¹⁹ibid., p.170.

²⁰Eliade, Morfologia..., p.74.

²¹ibid., p.74.

introduced a consciousness of the ritual dimension of the Mysteries in the Greek society. It was not without signification that Dionysian inebriation was replaced by an ecstatic concentration. As Aristotle noticed²², a *mystes* did not learn anything new (because he already had a knowledge of the myth), but he was making ritual gestures and was seeing sacred objects.

The most elaborate part of Orphism was the eschatology based on the idea of the soul's immortality. Plato²³ made specific allusions to this subject. The soul was considered closed in the body (*soma*) as in a grave (*sema*), as a punishment for a primordial guilt. Consequently the incarnate existence resembled death and the real death was thought of as the beginning of real life. But before acceding to this 'real life', the soul was judged according to its deeds and only after some time was reincarnated. Mircea Eliade remarked²⁴ the analogy with the Indian conceptions after the *Upanishads* (the belief in the soul's indestructibility and its transmigration until the final liberation). But the practice of mortifications, ablutions and incantations was not considered sufficient to release the divine particle of the soul from its carnal cage and the Orphics put a great stress upon initiation, believed essential. According to their faith, the non-initiates were condemned to have an infinite number of reincarnations, while the initiates had to undergo only a limited succession of transmigrations. Nevertheless, even if the 'Orphic life' supposed certain behavioural rules, salvation was unattainable without an initiation consisting of 'revelations of cosmological and theosophical type'²⁵. At the centre of the initiation was the myth of

²²See Eliade, *Nasteri...*, p. 146.

²³Eliade, *Istoria...*, vol. II, p. 172.

²⁴*ibid.*, p. 172.

²⁵*ibid.*, p. 184.

Dionysus-Zagreus and the descent into the Underworld. The Orphics had to undertake the journey Orpheus had done before them. For this trial, they were prepared beforehand with magic passwords and behaviour patterns which annihilated the potential dangers. One of the perils for example was **forgetfulness**: the souls, in order to avoid reincarnation, were forbidden to drink from the waters of Lethe (which led them to forget their former life). Another danger was **loss of orientation**. (As in the profane life losing the way is the very symbol of death, this would mean a double death, that is losing immortality.) Golden leaves with directions for the journey to Persephone's fields were discovered in the Orphics' graves. They specify that the soul will meet two paths and it must take the one on the right, which will lead it towards the lake of Memory.²⁶ Those succeeding in traversing the eschatological labyrinth were rewarded with divinity (as stands written on a tablet from Thurii, from around the fourth to third centuries B.C.): 'Happy and blessed one, thou shalt be god instead of mortal'²⁷.

Orphism (which appeared in Greece in the seventh to sixth centuries B.C.) was considered by Eliade 'the purest, the most sublimated and consummate mysticism of Antiquity'²⁸. It was also said that Orphism is indebted to the Dionysiac traditions at least in an indirect way.²⁹

²⁶ Eliade, Morfologia..., p.71.

²⁷ Mircea Eliade, Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World (New York, HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p.359.

²⁸ Eliade, Morfologia..., p.66.

²⁹ Eliade, Istoria..., vol. I, p.367.

DIONYSUS / ORPHEUS

As we mentioned earlier, in our view, the link between Dionysianism and Orphism is strong to the point of becoming one, the latter appearing as a more elaborate form of the former. Even the images of Dionysus and Orpheus could be symbolically equated. They were both **(1) kings with a Thracian descent or connection**; they **(2) undertook a descent into the Underworld**³⁰ and their **(3) death is similar**³¹: Dionysus is torn into pieces by the Titans, Orpheus by the Menads. Also **(4) Dionysus survives through his heart** (re-born by Semele) and **Orpheus survives (spiritually) through his head** (floating in Hebron's waters the head still sings and is worshipped later as an oracle). They both **(5) have connections with animals** (Dionysus incarnated different animals, Orpheus subdues them) and **(6) there is a resurrection involved**. As the **(7) concept of art** plays a major role (dithyrambs, tragedy and satirical dramas developed from the Dionysiac rituals; Orpheus was an artist himself, **(8) a narcissistic element** is part of both figures (Dionysus is tempted by the Titans with a mirror, Orpheus' head floats in waters - a symbolical equivalent of the mirror). Moreover their **(9) shamanic**³² **qualities** also relates them.

In his literary creation Eliade made use of elements from **Dionysiac rituals** and **Orphic eschatology**. He mixed the mythical figures of both Dionysus and Orpheus until he obtained texts condensed with mythological allusions within a syntax bearing an incantatorial dimension.

³⁰ 'When Dionysus withdraws his mother, Semele from the Underworld, Diodorus (IV, 25, 4) remarks the analogy with the descent of Orpheus in search of Eurydice'. Eliade, *Istoria...*, vol. II, p.169.

³¹ See also the theory according to which the death of Orpheus is interpreted as a Dionysiac ritual. *ibid.*, p.169.

³² For more information on shamanism of Dionysus and Orpheus see Eliade: *Istoria...* vol. II, p.168; *De la Zalmoxis...*, pp.49, 50, 51, 58; *Occultism...*, p.39; *Shamanism...*, pp. 241, 368, 383, 488.

The understanding of Eliade's fiction resides not in putting the pieces of the puzzle together, but in discovering that each piece is part of a different puzzle that should be solved. One of Eliade's creations in this category is 'At Dionysus' Court', a short story whose reading equates an initiation into the Mysteries. One of its multiple explanations is given by the author himself in his autobiography:

The basic 'symbolism' is evident...: it is the inversion of the Orphic myth. It is not Orpheus who descends in the underworld to fetch Eurydice back to life, but she, the woman (Leana), searches for him, finds and withdraws him from 'the underworld' (that is, from the 'loss of himself', amnesia, the alienation into which Adrian - periodically - fell). But how many other 'meanings', only suggested in the novel, are attached to the well-known mythological scenario !³³

('Simbolismul' de bază e evident... : e inversiunea mitului orfic. Nu Orfeu coboară în infern ca s-o readucă pe Euridice la viață, ci ea, femeia (Leana), îl caută, îl găsește și-l scoate din 'Infern' (adică, din 'pierderea de sine', amnezia, alienarea în care sombra - periodic - Adrian). Dar câte alte 'sensuri', doar sugerate în nuvelă, nu se adaugă bine cunoscutului scenariu mitologic !)

While Eliade's explanation remains valid, it may be held that at the basis of the short story lies not only the actual myth itself (the inverted version), but elements of the Orphic Mysteries as well. The fact that 'at Dionysus Court' an 'open text' allows plural interpretations, although the main grid is formed by Orpheus' mythology. The whole novella is based on a reciprocal search: of the poet Adrian for his lover Leana and hers for him. Their itineraries are reflected in a distorting mirror on a sacred - profane double plane. (This technique is also used by Eliade in his novel The Forbidden Forest which we will tackle later.) Leana looks for Adrian in the profane world (symbolised by restaurants), while his

³³Eliade, Jurnal..., vol. I, p.590.

search (disguised in the form of an appointment he has to attend) consists of a journey into the labyrinth of the sacred world (represented by the meandering of a hotel' corridors). The text could be easily read as an initiation into the Orphic eschatology. Eliade re-shaped the Orphic Mystery in a literary, new form, making it 'accessible' to those people able to 'understand'.³⁴ The main aspect of Orphism could be discovered 'camouflaged' underneath the literary entanglement of sequences. But Eliade brings a fresh view as well of the Orphic ideas, the same way Orpheus himself revolutionized the Dionysiac religion.

If Orpheus allegedly civilized Barbarians and tamed animals, his Eliadean equivalent, Adrian (in the novella 'At Dionysus' Court') tries to 'civilize' people again, by raising their level of consciousness through the magic of art:

'If the poetry doesn't succeed either, there is nothing else to do. I tried everything: religion, ethics, prophecy, revolution, science, technology. I employed all these methods, in turn or altogether, and none of them succeeded. I couldn't change the man. More precisely I couldn't transform him into a *true person*. From a certain point of view... we, remained as we were when Orpheus hadn't yet come amongst us, amongst wolves, wild boars and Thracians. ...'³⁵

('Dacă nici poezia nu reușește , nu mai e nimic de făcut. Am încercat tot: religie, morală, profetism, revoluție, știință, tehnologie. Am încercat, pe rând sau împreună, toate aceste metode, și nici una n-a reușit. N-am putut schimba omul. Mai precis, nu l-am putut transforma în *om adevărat*. Dintr-un anumit punct de vedere... am rămas așa cum eram când Orfeu încă nu venise printre noi, printre lupi, mistreți și traci. ...')

As we saw before, in Orphism, an obscure primordial sin was held responsible for mankind's duality: Titanic (obscure, beastly) - Dionysiac (radiant, divine). In Eliade's short story 'At Dionysus'

³⁴'I wonder what will be understood from this short story - and who will understand.' *ibid.*, p.590.

³⁵Eliade, *In Curte...*, p.515.

Court' the **Titanic** element is equivalent to **opacity of spirit**, while the **Dionysiac** one means **spiritual elevation**. The real message of Orpheus resided in his attempt to raise people from a bestial state (encaged in the senses) to a divine condition. The dichotomy **Titanic/Dionysiac** becomes in fact a **Profane/Sacred** one:

... we wait for Orpheus, we wait for that poet-genius whose verb *will compel* man to open himself towards spirit; in other words, he will precipitate the mutation coveted by all the religions and philosophies of the world.³⁶

(...așteptăm pe Orpheu, așteptăm pe acel poet de geniu al cărui verb *va sili* omul să se deschidă către spirit; cu alte cuvinte, va precipita mutația pe care au râvnit-o toate religiile și toate filozofiile din lume.)

Leana, an alter ego of Eurydice, is the one who spreads his poems, by putting them to music, making them known to the public. The sacred verses preserve their initiatory function, but they are no longer perceived as such, but by their aesthetic beauty. Adrian, disappointed by people's opacity at the sacred, tells Leana:

But this happened a long time ago, this was in the beginning. *In the beginning of the beginning*. And nobody understood. They did not understand that the poem was written under Orpheus' sign, that is was about Dionysus, and I was heralding the bliss without name in it, when we'll all be next to him, at his courts, of the king's, at the god's court...³⁷

(Dar asta a fost demult, asta a fost la început. *La începutul începutului*. Și nimeni n-a înțeles. N-au înțeles că poemul era scris sub semnul lui Orpheu, că era vorba de Dionysos, și vesteam acolo beatitudinea fără nume, când vom fi toți lângă el, alături de el, la curțile lui, ale împăratului, la curțile zeului...)

There is expressed here the Orphic concept according to which the initiate - after succeeding in the eschatological trial - is accepted in the

³⁶ibid., p.515.

³⁷ibid., p.526.

blissful realm of Dionysus. And as the Orphic ideology considered Dionysus the sovereign of the Universe, the *mystes* was supposed to become a god in his turn.

Dionysus was not only a divinity of vulgar drunkenness, but also of mystical drunkenness, that is 'mystical ecstasy'.³⁸ In the short story, Leana sings her archaic songs in open-air restaurants where people drink wine, late into the night. Often she herself drinks from the clients' glasses, in a ritual gesture, with a strange, ecstatic smile on her face. Orpheus was also supposed to be sometimes either a **divinity of darkness** or, on the contrary, a sort of liberator from darkness or ignorance, through the power of his magic songs³⁹. Those supporting this hypothesis referred to the celebration at night of the Orphic Mysteries as well. In Eliade's novella, Leana does not sing the initiatory songs except after dawn. Talking about Adrian's verses she confesses to this one:

'I had done as you taught me,... . I distributed them. I spread them. You told me to sing them at night.'

'At night only', Adrian interrupted her. 'To tame them. Because only at night can people, and only some of them, still be tamed.'⁴⁰

('Am făcut cum m-ai învățat,... . Le-am împărțit. Le-am risipit. Mi-ai spus să le cânt noaptea.'

'Numai noaptea', o întrerupse Adrian. 'Ca să-i îmblânzim. Căci numai noaptea oamenii, și numai unii din ei, mai pot fi îmblânziți.'

The Orphic belief in transmigration is also present in the texture of 'At Dionysus' Court'. The characters Adrian-Leana search for each other during different lives as well. Leana explains to her friends: 'I have

³⁸Kernbach, Dictionar..., p.143.

³⁹ibid., p.445.

⁴⁰Eliade, În Curte..., p.527.

been in love for a long time,... . I have always been in love. With the same person.' ('Sunt de mult îndrăgostită, De când mă știu sunt îndrăgostită. De același.') or 'For my sins, ... I do not know him yet, although I know who he is and I love him' ('Pentru păcatele mele,... nu-l cunosc încă, deși știu cine este și-l iubesc').⁴¹

But the most important Orphic scenario to which the novella 'At Dionysus' Court' is indebted is the paradigmatic eschatology. All the major elements of Orphic eschatology are woven into the text: the labyrinthian journey into the Underworld (symbolized by the hotel where Adrian has an 'appointment' with Death), the initiatric trials (thirst, amnesia, passwords), the presence of the dead souls (symbolized by people wearing masks), the mirrors (an equivalent of death, of the river Lethe and a centre of the Self). Even the Orphic perception of death as a blessing ('Beautiful indeed is the Mystery given to us by the blessed gods: dead is no longer an evil for mortals, but a blessing')⁴² found its equivalent in Leana's double identity: she is concomitantly 'Eurydice' and the Angel of Death. As we remarked in another chapter, Eliade identifies Woman with Death in many of his literary writings, in a supreme attempt to erase the negative meanings of the latter. As love is a sentiment as powerful as the fear of death, the author uses it as a counterbalance, in order to obtain the neutrality necessary for attaining complete Freedom. In the short story, Adrian understands and accepts his destiny: 'I told you, my love: I am not scared... My guardian angel, you, my love, Leana, you will also be the Angel of Death...' ('Ți-am spus, iubirea mea: nu mi-e frică... Îngerul meu păzitor, tu, iubirea mea, Leana, tot tu vei fi și Ingerul Morții...')⁴³. Thus

⁴¹ibid., p.487.

⁴²Eliade, 'Inscriptions found at Eleusis', Essential..., p.300.

⁴³Eliade, In Curte..., p.528,

death signifies not an end, but a necessary passage, while love lasts if the specific trials are overcome. And if the myth Orpheus loses his wife by turning his head, Eliade gives the couple another chance to accede, not to life, but to immortality:

'Adrian, Your Highness, *don't look back again*, she whispered, moving her lips close to his ear. Always look forward, otherwise we will get lost again, and who knows if we are destined to meet again...'.⁴⁴

('Adrian, măria-ta, *să nu te mai uiți înapoi*, șopti apropiindu-și buzele de urechea lui. Să privești tot înainte, că iar ne pierdem, și cine știe dacă ne va mai fi dat să ne regăsim...'.)

Like the Orphics on their eschatological journey, Adrian is consumed with thirst⁴⁵. He also suffers from **amnesia**⁴⁶ which is triggered indirectly by Leana⁴⁷. The **passwords** are of a profane nature (e.g. the simple name of person with whom Adrian has the meeting) or of a sacred-eschatological kind, like the verses recited by Leana:

On the winds I listen
to the Orphic tumult
when she tunes her string
The green girl, called Una...⁴⁸

(Pe vânturi ascult
Orficul tumult
când și-ardică struna
Fata verde, Una...)

⁴⁴ibid., p.529.

⁴⁵'An inscription found on an Orphic tablet (at Eleutherne) reads: "I burn, and I am consumed with thirst..."'. Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.198.

⁴⁶'...when the initiation ritual was finished, the neophyte had lost his past memory, he had forgotten his old I, he was nobody else but Dionysus.' Eliade, *Morfologia...*, p.81.

⁴⁷See Eliade, *Jurnal*, vol .I, p.591.

⁴⁸Eliade, *In Curte...*, p.526. The verses are from the poem entitled 'Cantilena' by Dan Botta.

The same verses are quoted in Eliade's early novel The Return from Paradise, a book also centred on the idea of death, seen as ecstatic liberation from the confinement of ordinary life. Torn between the physical love for two women and the need to accede to a more elevated way of being, Pavel Anicet envisages himself as a broken mirror (symbolic object in Orphism representing the Self). Death is considered an instrument of knowledge⁴⁹ and a step towards real freedom. One of Anicet's lovers, called Una, like the girl in the poem, is an equivalent of Eurydice/Death.

The 'problem of death' remains the centre of the philosophical discussions among the young characters from The Hooligans. The 'problem of freedom' is also intrinsically linked to it. Individual liberty is supposed to be an 'imperfect freedom', while 'collective freedom' is considered more 'grandiose' and 'euphoric'. War is presented in the novel as an alienating phenomenon which destroys the collective freedom. The adolescents' ideas are expressed cynically:

'Right, you said "euphoric liberty"', added Tomescu. 'A collective freedom, of the human species... Of course... There is the Dionysiac freedom, a perfect and equally intoxicated flock, running at night through forests and valleys, to rip the sacred animal... Now that we became civilized, will the liberty of the human species be obtained in regiments perfectly and equally intoxicated, running at night through forests and valleys to tear to pieces the soldiers of euphoric freedom ?...'⁵⁰

('Bine ai spus "libertate euforică"', adaugă Tomescu. 'O libertate colectivă, a speciei umane... Desigur... Există libertatea dionisiacă, o turmă perfect și egal intoxicată, alergând noaptea prin păduri și văi, ca să sfâșie animalul sfânt... Acum că ne-am civilizat, libertatea speciei umane se va obține în regimente perfect și egal intoxicate, alergând noaptea prin păduri și văi, ca să sfâșie soldații libertății euforice ?...')

⁴⁹Eliade, Intoarcerea..., p.238.

⁵⁰Eliade, Huliganii, p.162.

The idea of the 'collective freedom' is linked to the transcendental feeling of death. The masses' exaltations corresponded, in the young men's opinion to real experiences, like the crusades or the retreat of the people from the Barbarians' inroads:

There were perfect 'collective freedoms', because people were possessed by the feeling of death, which they feared, or towards which they went happily. There was present a grandiose feeling there: death.⁵¹

(Erau 'libertăți colective' perfecte, pentru că oamenii erau stăpâniți de sentimentul morții, de care se temeau, sau către care se îndreptau cu bucurie. Era prezent acolo un sentiment grandios: moartea.)

In his literary masterpiece The Forbidden Forest, Eliade employs ideas as similar to those found in the short story 'At Dionysus' Court': the two protagonists Stefan and Ileana search for each other in the labyrinth of the profane world, doubled by one of a sacred essence. Like Orpheus who loses Eurydice (by turning his head towards her), or similar to Adrian from 'At Dionysus' Court' who escapes Leana, Stefan also loses Ileana. Although they meet in Coimbra and make love in a hotel, Stefan, seized by an access of jealousy (in a symbolical way he 'turns his head back', because he accuses her of a past engagement to another man) leaves Ileana, despite her warnings:

'You will seek me to the confines of the earth and you will not find me again', Ileana said suddenly in an unbelievable calm voice. 'You will walk on your knees to the end of the world for me... You will not find me any more !...'⁵²

('Ai să mă cauți până la sfârșitul pământului și n-ai să mă găsești', vorbi deodată Ileana cu o voce neînchipuit de calmă. 'Ai să umbli în genunchi până la capătul lumii după mine... N-ai să mai mă găsești !...')

⁵¹ibid., p.163.

⁵²Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. II, p.95.

Despite her words they meet again but, as in 'At Dionysus' Court' their final encounter is but a prelude to death. Ileana takes the identity of an angel of death, she is the 'predestined' one who leads her lover to the other realm, by driving their car into an abyss. During their journey the hero confesses:

'My bride', Ștefan continued quickly, as if he did not hear her any longer, 'I loved you the way you loved me, like a madman, like a ghost, without understanding what I was doing, without understanding what happened to us, why were we predestined to love each other without loving each other, why were we predestined to search for each other without meeting...'.⁵³

('Mireasa mea', continuă Ștefan repede, ca și cum n-ar mai fi auzit-o, 'te-am iubit așa cum m-ai iubit și tu, ca un nebun, ca un strigoi, fără să înțeleg ce se întâmplă cu noi, de ce am fost urșiți să ne iubim fără să ne iubim, de ce am fost urșiți să ne căutăm fără să ne întâlnim...'.)

The fact that they have an accident in the very moment when, according to tradition, the skies open (the Midsummer Night), shows that their death is more a transcendent process into a superior level of existence. Love annihilates death and projects the protagonists into a godlike beatitude, prolonging their togetherness *ad infinitum*. The analogies between Ștefan and Orpheus abound. Similar to Orpheus, Ștefan is philosopher and artist. He enjoys painting, but it is the creative, mystical state which interests him, not the final oeuvre.

The main character in Nineteen Roses as well is an artist: a writer. Pandelescu's long-forgotten play, entitled 'Orpheus and Eurydice' represents the spiritual centre of an initiatic labyrinth. He is amazed when a mysterious young man reminds him of it:

⁵³ibid., p.411-12.

'But, how did you find out about *Orpheus and Eurydice* ?? it's the only play I've written in my life; it was never played and I didn't publish it anywhere, not even fragments of it in the magazines of the time.'

'It was a play in free verses', Serdaru resumed, 'a play more religious than philosophical, although it had as a subtitle: "Introduction to the oldest metaphysics"'.⁵⁴

('Dar cum ai aflat, domnule, de *Orpheu si Euridice* ?? Este singura piesă pe care am scris-o în viața mea; nu s-a jucat niciodată și n-am publicat-o nicăieri, n-am publicat nici măcar fragmente, în revistele timpului.'

'Este o piesă în versuri albe', reluă Serdaru, 'o piesă mai mult religioasă decât filozofică, deși avea ca sub-titlu: "Introducere la cea mai veche metafizică".')

The play has an epiphanic value and by remembering it, Pandelescu has a symbolical revelation of his own past and his real, original path as a sacred writer, like Orpheus himself. Through the magical love the hero (Pandelescu) had for the actress playing Eurydice's role, he could glimpse the other realm, by entering a sacred dimension. Like the Orphics, he becomes amnesiac after a specific experience, unable to recollect the happenings. Gradually, with the help of a young couple, he undergoes a process of anamnesis (through art) and remembers the most important episode of his life: his encounter with Eurydice / Death, their love and separation.

From the series of Eliade's literary writings following the pattern of the Orphic ideology, the short story 'Dayan' is closest to the paradigm of its eschatological initiation. The labyrinth of the Underworld, the two springs on the left and right hand sides), the thirst, are all elements of Orphic eschatology, in which Dayan is initiated by The Wandering Jew:

'I feel somehow tired, and I feel very thirsty.'

'And, as you can see, we are heading for two wells', said the old man stretching his arm and showing them to him, not too far away, flowing silently among poplars and cypresses. 'But be very careful, he added. Don't drink at random and don't drink too much.'⁵⁵

⁵⁴Eliade, *Nouăsprezece...*, p. 18.

⁵⁵Eliade, 'Dayan', *La Umbra...*, vol. V, p. 145.

('Mă simt cam obosit, și mi-e tare sete !')

'Și, după cum vezi, ne îndreptăm spre doua izvoare', spuse bătrânul întinzând brațul și arătându-i-le, nu prea departe, curgând tăcute între plop și chiparoși. 'Dar să fii cu mare băgare de seamă, adaogă. Să nu bei la întâmplare și să nu bei prea mult'.)

A 'degraded' version of the Orphic myth could be discovered even in the novella 'With the Gypsy Girls'. Gavrilescu, a piano teacher, undergoes the initiatory stages of the Underworld path: he enters the maze of the Gypsies' house, he becomes very thirsty etc. Although he fails the trials, he finally meets his 'Eurydice' in the form of his lover Hildegard, who leads him towards the final resting place.

Analysing Eliade's literary creations, it can be said that he reshaped the myths of Dionysus and Orpheus, adapting them to his own system of thought comporting: the coexistence of the Sacred with the Profane and the annihilating effect of love upon death (both states envisaged as instruments of knowledge and potential triggers of immortality).

QUEST FOR PERFECTION:

THE MYTH OF THE ANDROGYNE

Motto : 'I am the great He-She,
I am he who did what seemed good to him,
I took my space in the place of my will,
Mine is the space of those who move along
like those two serpentine circles.'

('Atum, a Bisexual High God' - Coffin Texts, 161, ff in Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World, p.25, ed., by Mircea Eliade)

In order to understand the metaphysical meaning of the myth of the androgyne myth, one must rely on the concept - so widely spread in many traditions - of *coincidentia oppositorum*. As Mircea Eliade pointed out in The Two and the One¹ the *identity of contraries* was, for Nicolas of Cusa, 'the least imperfect definition of God'. Carl Gustav Jung considered *coincidentia oppositorum* the final aim of integral psychic activity (the individuation process supposes the perfect assimilation of both conscious and unconscious within the self).² In Analytical Psychology's view the human being is made of particles of collective recollections and, in this sense, the idea of personal identity becomes questionable. From this stemmed, according to Jung, the need for a unified personality ('Only an unified personality can experience life, not that personality which is split up into partial aspects, that bundle of odds

¹Mircea Eliade, *Op.cit.* (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1995), p.74.

²'The self is not only the centre, but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the centre of this totality, just as the ego is the centre of consciousness.' Carl Gustav Jung, Dreams (London, Ark Paperback, 1991), p.115.

and ends which also calls itself “man”.)³ This represents in our opinion one of the psychological leads underlying the myth of the androgyne and could be explanatory for the wide, universal area over which this myth is spread. (Androgynous divinities are present in the ancient Middle East, China, Indonesia, India, Africa, America, Melanesia, Australia, Polynesia, etc.)

In religion the *union of opposites* is a way of expressing ‘the paradox of divine unity’⁴. As Mircea Eliade emphasized:

All that is par excellence must be total, assuming *coincidentia oppositorum* at all levels and in all contexts. This is verified in the androgyny of gods and in the ritual of symbolic androgynization, in the cosmogonies which explain the World springing from a cosmogonic Egg or from a primordial totality in the shape of a sphere.⁵

(Tot ce este prin excelență trebuie să fie total, comportând *coincidentia oppositorum* la toate nivelurile și în toate contextele. Fapt verificat atât în androginia zeilor, cât și în ritualurile de androginizare simbolică, dar și în cosmogoniile care explică Lumea pornind de la un Ou cosmogonic sau de la o totalitate primordială de forma unei sfere.)

Before seeking completeness in himself, man attributed it to Divinity. The latter is perfect, above all opposites. Unlike man, split into contradictory tendencies, God can be either good or bad, helpful or threatening **while retaining his wholeness**. He still preserves all attributes and it is circumstance only that shows one face of the same divine, perfect personality. Furthermore, the most important aspect of gods is that they, unless human, are endowed with many contradictory attributes **at the same time** (thus annulling the idea of Time).

³ibid., p.155.

⁴Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.419.

⁵Eliade, *Mefistofel...*, p.101.

As we will see later, the initiation rituals of androgyny consist of the expression of Man's desire to acquire the divine, transcendental perfection and Freedom (in a sacred sense). The idea of both sexes more or less clearly expressed together comes, according to Eliade, from the very concept of all the attributes coexisting together:

Divine androgyny is simply a primitive formula for the divine bi-unity; mythological and religious thought, before expressing this concept of divine two-in-oneness in metaphysical terms (*esse* and *non esse*), or theological terms (the revealed and unrevealed), expressed it first in the biological terms of bisexuality.⁶

As man has always seen in Divinity an exemplary model, he also wanted to perfect himself to the point of abolishing all contraries. It could be said that the archaic mind had the intuition of a great Oneness and that the divisions (male/female, good/bad, one/more) were generally envisaged as being the causes of pain and suffering. Employing the Jungian terms, we could say that the primitive mind discovered the presence of *animus* and *anima* merged inside the Self. From this perspective, we can assert that the re-enacting of the androgynous image in different religious traditions helped the reconstruction of the psychic wholeness of the communities' members, usually strictly divided according to sex. Through conceptualizing gods as androgynous, human beings wanted to become, in a symbolical way, themselves androgynous. Thereby they would not only transcend their condition as humans, but also complete their own self with that missing part (called in Psychological Analysis *anima* or *animus*), that could guarantee their psychic equilibrium in a group governed by strict rules and taboos. No

⁶Eliade, Patterns..., pp.420-21.

wonder that in a highly comparted society like the Hindu one, the surpassing of the contraries becomes a leitmotif:

By philosophical reflection and contemplation - as the Vedanta teaches us - or through psycho-physiological techniques and meditation as Yoga recommends - we could transcend the oppositions, even accomplish *coincidentia oppositorum* in our own body and in our spirit.⁷

(Prin reflecție filozofică și contemplație - așa cum ne învăța Vedanta - sau prin tehnici psihofiziologice și meditații - cum recomandă Yoga, - ajungem să transcendem opozițiile, chiar să realizăm *coincidentia oppositorum* în propriul nostru corp și în propriul nostru spirit.)

The Naasean sect envisaged Adam, the celestial Being, as an *arsénothélyls* ('man-woman'). The terrestrial Adam was also androgynous; this idea implying that the *arsénothélyls* existed in each man as an expression of spiritual expression. The Logos was also considered as being androgynous.⁸

Another important idea we shall emphasize in this introductory presentation is the difference between the androgyne and the common hermaphrodite. Mircea Eliade always insisted on this aspect, warning about the possible confusions. In his discussions with Claude Henri-Rocquet, published in the volume The Labyrinth's Trial, he highlights: 'In the hermaphrodite the two sexes coexist. ... While the androgyne represents the ideal of perfection; the two sexes are merged. It is another human type, another species...' ('In hermafrodit cele două sexe coexistă. ... În timp ce androginul reprezintă idealul perfecțiunii: cele două sexe sunt contopite. Este o altă specie umană, o

⁷Eliade, Mefistofel..., p.88.

⁸ibid., p.97.

altă specie...')⁹. In The Two and the One the historian of religions demonstrated that the androgyne represented 'a new type of humanity in which the sexes' fusion would have produced a new consciousness'¹⁰, freed from any polarity. The anatomical hermaphrodite was considered in antiquity to be an aberration of Nature or a bad omen, and consequently was killed at birth. Only the ritual androgyne was a model as 'it did not imply the accumulation of anatomical organs but, in a symbolical way, the totality of magico-religious powers belonging to each of the two sexes.' ('implica nu cumulul organelor anatomice, ci, în mod simbolic, totalitatea puterilor magico-religioase aferente celor două sexe.')¹¹. This explains the fact that even divinities considered masculine or feminine *par excellence* are androgynous. Mircea Eliade already pinpointed the androgyny of figures like the Mother Goddess or a He-God. This idea triggers the need to carefully reconsider the particular assumptions that some gods and goddesses represent masculine or feminine principles. The whole concept is debatable, as these gods and goddesses seem to be, in our opinion, general symbolical concepts, the form only being male, female or androgynous and thus more accessible to human understanding. This view is supported by the fact that the majority of divinities are either androgynous or, later, represented by divine couples. Following this line of reasoning, Eliade's assumption that divinities have an intimate feminine or masculine structure¹² remains questionable. As we showed earlier, ancient man felt the need to borrow the divinity's attributes, thus conferring on the First

⁹Mircea Eliade, Inercarea labirintului (Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Dacia, 1990), p.15.

¹⁰Mircea Eliade, Op.cit., (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1995), p.93.

¹¹ibid., p.93.

¹²... androgyny becomes, finally, an attribute of divinity and it cannot tell us anything about the intimate structure of this divinity. A god, man *par excellence*, could be androgynous, as well as the Mother-Goddess.' Mircea Eliade, Mitul eternei reîntoarceri, in Eseuri (Bucharest, Ed. Științifică, 1991), p.263. The underlining is mine.

Man (the mythical ancestor), god-like characteristics. This way he could bring the ineffable concepts close to his human nature. As Mircea Eliade underlines, 'The divine myth forms the paradigm for man's religious experience. a great many traditions hold that "primeval man", the ancestor, was a hermaphrodite...'.¹³

Considered to be spherical - an image of wholeness and perfection - the androgyne was integrated into a cosmic vision; (e.g. at the Naasean sect androgyny was a formula for cosmic totality, while Plato considered that the spherical shape and the movements of the Primeval man are similar to the planets' trajectories).¹⁴

Another essential aspect of the myth of the androgyne is its **initiatory character**. The myth was transmitted as a secret doctrine among initiates. (This was the case in at least three mystical traditions: Christian, Judaic, Islamic)¹⁵. This enclosure in elitist communities protected its metaphysical meanings from vulgar interpretations. The secret character also evidences the importance of the myth in those societies. In alchemy for example, the myth of the androgyne played an essential role: one of the central symbols of Hermetism was *Rebis*, the cosmic androgyne. (The Philosophers' Stone itself - obtained by the union of the masculine and feminine principles - was also called *Rebis* or the 'Hermetic Androgyne').¹⁶ We can also talk of a certain parallel between the function of **cosmogonies** and the **myth of the androgyne**. Just as in some re-enactings of cosmogonies where the world, before being re-created and ordered, has to be returned to chaos, so the human being, in order to assume his/her role in society

¹³Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.423.

¹⁴For more information see Eliade, *Istoria...*, vol. II, p.185; *Mefistofel...*, p.97.

¹⁵Eliade, *Mitul reintegrării* (1942), p.80.

¹⁶For further information see Mircea Eliade, *Cosmologie și alchimie babiloniană* (Iași, Ed. Moldova, 1991), *Mitul reintegrării* (1942), p.82 and the study of Carl Gustav Jung, 'Individual dream symbolism in relation to Alchemy' in *Dreams*.

according to gender, has to revert to the non-differentiated Primeval Being (suggesting the fullness of potentiality). In this respect we consider this myth part of the *regeneratio* series of myths (e.g. the myth of the eternal return).

In practical religious life, it can be said as a general view, that the myth of the androgyne tended to be expressed through what we call **(1) a 'degraded' version** (transvestism, practised among members of opposite sexes during certain ceremonies, orgies, feasts); and **(2) a 'sublimated' one**, (alchemy or shamanism). Analysing the symbolical meaning of inter sexual transvestism, Eliade showed that it represented:

... a modality to go out from one's self, ... and to find again the transhuman and transhistorical origins, the situation which preceded the formation of human society; a paradoxical situation... in which one has to re-integrate oneself periodically in order to re-make the initial plenitude, the entire source of sacrality and power.¹⁷

(... o modalitate de a ieși din sine însuși,... și de a regăsi situația de la începuturi, transumană și transistorica, acea situație paradoxală, ... în care trebuie să te reintegrezi periodic, spre a reface... plenitudinea inițială, sursa neștirbită a sacralității și a puterii.)

A 'sublimated' version of this myth can be encountered in shamanism. Among the Ngadju Dyak of Southern Borneo for example, the priest-shaman called *basir* has to be bisexual and impotent. Mircea Eliade explains¹⁸ that this condition is necessary as the shamans 'combine in their own person the feminine element (earth) and the masculine element (sky)' and are considered 'intermediaries between the two cosmological planes - earth and sky' by the members of their community. Consequently the historian of religions draws the

¹⁷Eliade, Mefistofel..., p.106.

¹⁸Eliade, Shamanism..., p.352.

conclusion that this situation is a reminiscence of 'a ritual androgyny, a well known archaic formula for the divine biunity and the *coincidentia oppositorum*'.

To conclude our brief introduction into the ideas surrounding the androgyne myth we highlight its essential aspects: (1) the concept of **coincidentia oppositorum** which lies at the root of the myth; (2) the difference that should be established between the image of the **androgyne** and the **vulgar hermaphrodite**; (3) the two main forms: **'degraded'** (e.g. orgies, transvestism) and **'sublimated'** (e.g. alchemy, shamanism, Tantrism, Kabbalah), in which the myth expressed its perennality. Eliade's religious studies of the myth of the androgyne help the researcher to understand his literary writings in a new light. Striving towards a primordial Unity represents a feature that characterizes many of his fictions', ^{heroes and} though the desire to acquire wholeness of Being is religious by its intrinsic nature, the ways the protagonists choose to reach the same end, are different. From the multitude of paths taken by Eliade's characters in search of Unity, three are recurrent: 1) asceticism and cerebrality; 2) Love as a starting point or and end; 3) Death and reintegration into Nature.

I. ASCETICISM AND CEREBRALITY

One of the characteristics which the Naasean Gnostic sect believed to be inherent in an androgynous state was **absolute asceticism**. Mircea Eliade wrote that through asceticism 'the *profane* human condition could be annihilated; this meaning the actualisation of the primordial condition, non-differentiated, freed of any attribute and specificity.' ('se poate suprima conditia umana *profana*; ceea ce inseamna actualizarea conditiei primordiale, nediferentiate, degajate de orice atribut si specificitate')¹⁹. In the novel The Light Dying Away, Mircea Eliade introduces the idea of an interrelation between asceticism and the androgynous state, through the image of the book's main character: Cesare. His tragic condition is 'to behave like humans after incinerating the last human nucleus inside him' ('a se comporta ca oamenii dupa ce si-a incinerat cel din urma nucleu uman in el').²⁰ The plot of the book is organized around Cesare, a mythical hero, who - lost in a profane world - tries to return to his initial condition and understand it. In a provincial library, a group of three people: two men (Manoil, Dr Weinrich) and a woman (Melania) start a big fire through the power of a Tantric rite. In the meantime Cesare, the dull and erudite librarian who was studying Greek manuscripts, is caught in the blaze. The naked woman (Melania) implores Cesare to save her and he throws away his manuscripts to take her outside, through the flames. Following this choice, he is thrown out of his perfect world and his state of androgyny into the profane world. He starts losing his eyesight and, with it, his magic capacity to 'ignore' things, an attribute noticed by his friend Haruni:

¹⁹Eliade, Mitul reintegrarii, (1942), p. 87.

²⁰Eliade, Lumina..., vol.II, p.76.

You have a specific faculty: to *ignore*. You ignore the environment, you ignore the century, you ignore sex - without effort, without conflict, purely and simply because your cerebral system is one of the *beginning*... you are more free from innumerable and boring pleasures,... you are *more free* than us, and... you are born like this...²¹

(Ai o facultate specifică: de a *ignora*. Ignori mediul, ignori veacul, ignori sexul - fără eforturi, fără conflict, pur și simplu pentru că sistemul tău cerebral e cel al *începutului*... ești mai liber de nenumărate și plictisitoare voluptăți, ... ești *mai liber* decât noi, și... te-ai născut astfel.)

Cesare is a symbolic embodiment of the perfect Man who realises the imperfection of the world into which he had 'fallen' (the fire equates to the 'Fall'). As a consequence he discovers the woman outside him (Melania), as opposed to the feminine principle inside him:

She is always she, chaste and predestined, beyond touch, mine or anyone else's. I love her - but she is inside me, I live inside her, we are realities, we two, we are real as long as we are together; otherwise, isolated, ... we are mad, illusions, shadows. Japanese shadows; projections of the others.²²

(Ea e întotdeauna ea, neprihanită și ursită, dincolo de atingere, a mea sau a oricui. O iubesc - dar e în mine, eu trăiesc în ea, suntem realități, noi doi, suntem aieva atât timp cât suntem împreună; altminteri, izolați, ... suntem nebuni, iluzii, umbre. Umbre japoneze; proiecții ale celorlalți.)

Before experiencing the tragic condition of the First Man (the splitting and the Fall), Cesare succeeded in annulling any dependence on the other sex by his androgynous mental state (a synthesis of the masculine and feminine principles). Haruni (his name is reminiscent of Aruni, the Upanishadic philosopher), the Turkish mathematician, reveals his real nature: 'through your structural, organic, cold simplicity - you are a *chosen-one*. Do you understand me ? A chosen one, a man who could be free, who could act freely and disinterestedly, while we, the others,

²¹ibid., vol. I, pp.89-90.

²²ibid., vol. II, p.20.

found in between two worlds... ('prin simplitatea ta structurală, anorganică, rece - ești un ales. Mă înțelegi ?, un ales, un om care poate fi liber, care poate acționa liber și dezinteresat, în timp ce noi, ceștialalți, între două lumi...')²³. It could be assumed that Cesare has the condition of a *jīvan mukta* ('the liberated-one during life'), that is 'somebody who, living in the World, is not conditioned by the structures of the World, The *jīvan mukta* lives simultaneously in time and in eternity; his existence is paradoxical, in the sense that he represents a *coincidentia oppositorum* impossible to understand or imagine.' ('cineva care, trăind în Lume, nu este condiționat de structurile Lumii... *Jīvan mukta* trăiește simultan în timp și în eternitate; existența lui este paradoxală, în sensul că reprezintă o *coincidentia oppositorum* imposibil de înțeles sau de imaginat.')²⁴. Cesare is born androgynous in XXth century, and Mircea Eliade makes use in this novel of one of his most important ideas as historian of religions: the apparition of the Sacred in a space considered profane and people's incapacity to understand and perceive it as Sacred. Cesare - as a measure of others' anomaly in sacred terms - becomes himself an anomaly in relation to the profane condition of the others.

From the idea of the possible annulling of the common condition through asceticism, springs the obsession of Eliade's literary characters with chastity. In his early short story 'Maddalena', the painter Salust's pupil tries to acquire the bliss of wholeness together with Maddalena, through a sort of highly spiritualised eroticism, without consummating the act. But the young girl does not understand the function of the ritual, preferring instead a more profane love. Dav, the protagonist from The Return from Paradise, corroborates his intense intellectual activity with his virginity. This is reminiscent of the androgynous condition

²³ibid., vol. I, p.88.

²⁴Eliade, Mefistofel..., p.85.

which implies the attribute of auto-sufficiency. Common love is considered splitting and unbearable for a highly developed spirit. As one of the characters points out:

Jesus, if He loves us so much, and if He felt all the misery of love, should teach us not to love any more. He should tell us, 'Be strangers to one another'. To remain strangers, neutral towards one another; only thus will we find happiness on earth !²⁵

(Iisus, dacă ne iubește atât de mult, dacă a simțit și el toată mizeria dragostei, ar trebui să ne învețe să nu mai iubim. 'Fiți unul cu altul ca streinii' așa ar trebui să ne spună. Să rămânem streini, neutri unul față de altul; numai așa vom întâlni fericirea pe pământ !)

The more cerebral the character, the greater his incapacity to love. This is the case, for example, of Ciru Partenie, 'the Great Man' from the novel The Forbidden Forest. In the short stories 'Youth without Youth' and 'A Great Man' the same idea is enriched with special connotations: a mythical condition projects one out of time while Perfection implies the impossibility of a profane, limiting love. Dominic Matei, the character from 'Youth without Youth' suffers an accident which triggers hypermnesia. He is endowed with a perfect brain and with powers of rejuvenation, but when he lives together with a woman (Veronica), Dominic realizes that his special condition projects her into a different, regressive time. The idea underlying the text is that the sacred becomes dangerous for those who are not able or 'chosen' to accept it. The same is true for the hero of the short story 'A Great Man' who possesses a special gland which makes him reach gigantic dimensions, and which others (the common people) had lost since the Pleistocene period. He represents a type of Anthropos who 'stands for man's wholeness, that is, the conception of a unitary being who existed before

²⁵ Eliade, Intoarcerea..., p. 112.

man and at the same time represents man's goal.'²⁶ But the experience of the Sacred proves tragic for the character who, being a profoundly profane spirit, does not understand and refuses to accept his privileged condition. Like Dominic Matei from 'Youth without Youth', Cucoanes from 'A Great Man' has to separate from his lover. Acknowledging the impossibility of remaining together with his fiancée, he confesses to his friend: 'Nothing has changed, apparently, there has been no disaster, no death and yet we are now separated, we *must* separate, purely and simply, because *it cannot be another way* !... ('Nimic nu s-a schimbat, în aparență, nici un dezastru, nici o moarte și totuși acum suntem despărțiți, *trebuie* să ne despărțim, pur și simplu, pentru că *nu se poate altfel* !...)²⁷

The Sacred, as we emphasized earlier, is beyond common, profane love. This is why only a sacred love, raised to cosmic dimensions (as in Tantrism for example), could project the pair into the bliss of Totality.

²⁶Carl Gustav Jung, Dreams (London, Ark Paperbacks, 1991), p.236.

²⁷Mircea Eliade, 'Un om mare', Secretul...., vol. II, p.97.

2. LOVE AS A STARTING POINT OR AN END

Love is one of the main ways through which Eliade's literary characters choose to accomplish the androgynous plenitude. The idea is developed predominantly in three novels: Marriage in Heaven, The Light Dying Away, The Forbidden Forest. Love in itself has a ritual function which restores the feeling of primordial androgyny:

In the myth and rituals of the androgyne, man tries to return to the state of non differentiated 'totalness' of 'the ancestor'. Very many things derive from this, which are forgotten today, or without any meaning to the modern consciousness. Amongst others, from this it is derived the ritualistic value of love, through which man loses himself, merging into the other.²⁸

(In mitul și ritualele androginului, omul încearcă să se întoarcă la starea 'totală', nediferențiată, a 'strămoșului'. De aici derivă foarte multe lucruri, astăzi uitate sau fără nici un înțeles pentru conștiința modernă. Derivă, între altele, valoarea rituală a dragostei, prin care omul se pierde pe sine, contopindu-se cu celălalt.)

This particular meaning of love was employed by Eliade in the novel Marriage in Heaven. Real love should not be mistaken for the reproductive instinct, as the former is the re-enacting of the 'original' beatitude when Man was androgynous. The plot of Marriage in Heaven is simple and almost Boccaccian. Two men, a writer and a businessman, are invited to a mansion for a hunting-party. The night before the hunt they recount to each other the stories of their lives. When the morning comes they both realise that they loved, in turn, the same woman. The common factor which make them recognize their lover in other's story is not a chronological or casual detail, but the magic quality of the woman. The relationship between her and Mavrodin (the writer), preserves sublimated nuances of androgyny:

²⁸Eliade, Mitul reintegrării (1942), p.99.

Beyond sensuality, beyond lust, a perfect rediscovery of your own self is possible in an embrace, as if you find - for the first time - another part of yourself, which 'closes' you, completes you, revealing to you another experience of the world, enriched with other, new dimensions...²⁹

(Dincolo de voluptate, dincolo de rut, este cu putință o regăsire desăvârșită în îmbrățișare, ca și cum ai cuprinde - pentru întâia oară o altă parte din tine, care te 'încheie', te completează, revelându-ți altă experiență a lumii, îmbogățită cu alte, noi dimensiuni...)

Mavrodin experiences, through love, the bliss of an undivided, original state and he recollects the times when he had felt homologated to Divinity:

In fact, the perfect knowledge of Ileana's body did not reveal to me something I possessed, something that belonged to me, but it revealed to me my own being, my marvellous being, perfect and free. In those fleeting instants, a great Man - cosmic and alive - was growing from the mystery and through Ileana's body.³⁰

(De fapt, cunoașterea desăvârșită a trupului Ileanei nu-mi revela ceva pe care îl posedam, ceva care îmi aparținea, ci îmi revela propria mea ființă, făptura mea minunată, perfectă și liberă. În clipele acelea fulgerate, un mare Om - cosmic și viu - creștea din taina și cu trupul Ileanei.)

During ecstasy the consciousness arises that man and woman are organically one. The idea is reminiscent of Indian mysticism, whose goal is to identify man with a divine pair, thus accomplishing androgyny.³¹ Life could be endless, and man dies just because he is alone, separated in two. Only through love can he still accede to the eternal autonomy of the mythical Man. We can also identify here the fundamental concept of the theosophical thinkers (Böhme, Gichtel) according to which the divine Virgin, Sophia, was initially inside the primordial Being and she

²⁹Eliade, Maitreyi..., p.212.

³⁰ibid., pp. 212-13.

³¹Eliade, Mitul reintegrării, (1942), p.102.

later separated from Him. The title of the book itself (Marriage in Heaven) recalls Baader's theory that the aim of marriage as a sacred mystery is in fact the restoration of the celestial image of Being, and that the function of sexual love is 'to help man and woman to integrate, on an interior level, the complete human image, that is the original divine image.' ('să ajute barbatul și femeia să integreze în plan interior imaginea umană completă, adică imaginea divină originală.')³²

As opposed to this form of love, the protagonist (Cesare) from The Light Dying Away experiences, as we mentioned earlier, a completely spiritualised, ascetic form of love, which did not require the erotic act, but the primordial revelation that the woman is in fact, his own feminine aspect. Melania represents, as in myth or in ritual, 'the cosmological principle woman embodies'.³³ Cesare has the intuition of their indissoluble unity, that without her female principle inside him, he would not have been what he was: an androgyne lost in the XXth the century. As with divine androgyny, the Cesare-Melania androgyny preserves a metaphysical value.

The novel The Forbidden Forest could be situated half way between Marriage in Heaven (with its concept of attainment of the androgynous state through eros) and The Light Dying Away (androgyny obtained through sublimation into pure asceticism). The two protagonists (Stefan and Ileana) attempt to leave the profane space (they travel separately in different countries looking for each other) and profane time (they finally meet after twelve years, that is a full circle equivalent to a complete annulment of time). They also have to overcome the traps of the illusory profane world (he is married to another woman, she marries another man). In a sense they are the re-enactment of a divine couple

³²Eliade, Mefistofel..., p.94.

³³Eliade, Patterns..., p.421.

and as Eliade puts it: 'Divine couples... are most usually later apparitions or imperfect formulations of the primeval androgyny that characterizes all divinities.'³⁴ From this stems one of the recurring ideas of Eliade's characters: predestination in love. As this is a transcendental feeling ('...even the essential act of love triggers an experience - of course, very blurred - of androgyny')³⁵, it cannot be limited to the profane world and to one's power of choosing.

Two other possible ways of attaining the androgynous state are: 1) **Tantra-Yoga techniques** and 2) **loving, at the same time, two beings of different sexes**. The first method is employed by Dr Zerlendi, in Eliade's short story 'The Secret of Dr Honigberger'. Dr Zerlendi initiates himself in advanced Yoga techniques in order to reach the mythical place called Shambala. But he cannot accede to another level of existence until a certain unification of contrary currents (feminine and masculine) re-creates an androgynous state:

In that instant I had the precise sensation that I was spherical, that I became an impenetrable bubble, perfectly impermeable. Plenary feeling of autonomy, of invulnerability. The myths about primitive man, conceived in the form of a sphere, derive from this experience of the unification of the currents.³⁶

(În acea clipă am avut senzația precisă că sunt sferic, că am devenit o bulă impenetrabilă, perfect impermeabilă. Sentiment plenar de autonomie, de invulnerabilitate. Miturile referitoare la omul primitiv, conceput sub formă de sferă, derivă din această experiență a unificării curenților.)

The scientific explanation of the process can be found in Mircea Eliade's book The Two and the One³⁷ and consequently we do not dwell on this technique. The way of reaching an androgynous state through loving

³⁴ibid., p.422.

³⁵Eliade, Mitul reintegrării, (1942), p.107.

³⁶Eliade, Secretul..., vol. II, p.37.

³⁷The final aim of the Tantric doctrine is the unification of the two polar principles: Śiva

two beings of opposite sexes at the same time gained full expression in Eliade's novel Isabel and the Devil's Waters. The main character has a double relationship : with Isabel and with Tom. The characters embody, in a distilled way, the pure feminine (Isabel) and masculine (Tom) principles. But the experience fails. Introducing an erotic element into his relationships, 'the Doctor' (the main character) destroys both of them.

The primeval Unity cannot be understood and expressed any longer in a profane society. The influence exerted by Balzac's novel Séraphita upon the early literary writings of Eliade may account for the introduction of this theme in his fiction. He even tried to analyse in one of his books the androgynous condition as expressed by Balzac's character Séraphitus-Séraphita:

...Séraphitus-Séraphita cannot leave this earth before experiencing love. Maybe this is the last and the most precious accomplishment: to really love, in the Christian meaning, two beings of different sexes, and love them at the same time.³⁸

(...Séraphitus-Séraphita nu poate părăsi acest pământ înainte de a cunoaște dragostea. Poate că aceasta este cea din urmă și cea mai de preț desăvârșire: a iubi real, adică în sens creștin, două făpturi de sexe diferite, și le iubi în același timp.)

Love, in general, bears in Mircea Eliade's narratives the connotation of the '*miraculous*'. Whether highly erotic or sublimated to abstraction,

and Śakti - in one's own body. When Śakti, who sleeps under the shape of a serpent (kundalinī),... is awoken by certain yogic techniques, she moves through a median channel (susumnā), goes through many *cakras* and rises up to the top of the head (sahasrara), where Śiva lives - and unites with him. The merging of the divine couple in the interior of one's own body transforms the yogi into a sort of "androgynous". Eliade, Op. cit., p.111.

³⁸Eliade, Mitul reintegrării (1942), p.73.

vulgarized or sanctified, love still preserves the quality of a beginning or an end in relation to an androgynous condition.

3. DEATH AND REINTEGRATION INTO NATURE

Death becomes an important initiatic trial towards Perfection. Eliade made use of the Heideggerian idea³⁹ that an existence becomes authentic when an individual comprehends the inevitability of death and realizes the 'freedom-into-death' (*Freiheit zum Tode*). Pavel Anicet, the character from The Return from Paradise prepares his suicide as the only possible path towards Unity, against the attrition of daily life: 'Hm, it is true that death has got this rare fascination of unity. You are alone there, and you are everything though, you are everywhere. Thirsty for unity, thirsty for death then !' ('Hm, e adevărat că moartea are această rară fascinație a unității. Ești singur acolo, și totuși ești totul, ești pretutindeni. Insetat de unitate, însetat de moarte deci !')⁴⁰.

Death could also become an instrument of knowledge as it represents the state where man becomes finally complete, perfect, unseparated. In the short story 'Dayan' the Wandering Jew teaches Dayan the secret of Immortality: Death combined with Love. But only abstract, 'real love' could equate to immortality, that is love for Madonna Intelligenza. Hearing Dayan's answer that he only loved poetry and mathematics, the Wandering Jew replies: 'Maybe, the one and the other are nothing but the faces of the ineffable *Madonna Intelligenza*. Up until now, you could have not chosen better: Wisdom, who is at the same time the Eternal Woman and the woman you will love.' ('Poate că, și una și alta, nu sunt decât chipurile inefabilei *Madonna Intelligenza*. Până acum, ai ales cum nu se putea mai bine: Înțelepciunea, care e totodată

³⁹Eliade, Occultism..., p.46.

⁴⁰Eliade, Întoarcerea..., p.77.

Femeia Eternă și femeia pe care ai s-o iubești.')⁴¹. The lines express precisely the theosophical idea of the primordial, divine Virgin, Sophia, who existed inside primeval Man and separated from him. Consequently Dayan is advised to reintegrate into his personality the occult woman with her double face: Wisdom (poetry, mathematics) and Love (the common love towards woman: when a man loves a woman, he desires in fact the celestial Virgin from the beginnings⁴².

The other form of experiencing the perennity of death is the regression into a preformal state, through a reintegration into the inorganic world. Through his return to primordiality, man becomes 'undivided by attributes and polarities'⁴³ and can be easily absorbed in Divinity. This is the case with Cucoanes, the giant in the short story 'A Great Man'. Once his dimensions change he is no longer able to live among other mortals and retires into the mountains, where he suffers a symbolical *regressus* into matter (he cannot speak or behave like a human anymore). In the short story 'The Snake' the couple Andronic-Dorina follows the three necessary initiatory steps to attain an androgynous state: death - rebirth - wedding. They 'die' to the profane world by crossing a river and, re-born into spirit, with 'a more god-like body'⁴⁴, they reunite on a primordial island and melt into Nature. The same coincidence of Love with Death and the reintegration into the inorganic circuit is present in Eliade's literary masterpiece The Forbidden Forest. The main characters, Stefan and Ileana, symbolically reedit the primordial couple: he is a sky god (he has an obsession with St John's Night, when the skies open), she is a chthonian goddess (a

⁴¹Eliade, 'Dayan', La Umbra..., vol. V, p.148.

⁴²Eliade, Mefistofel..., p.95.

⁴³Eliade, Mitul reintegrării (1942), p.88.

⁴⁴Eliade, 'Sarpele', Domnișoara..., vol. I, p.232.

deity of vegetation and of the Underworld).

Because of the androgyny present in their texture, the love stories that appear in Eliade's fiction contain an ineffable characteristic: they remain unaccomplished in this world and they mingle with death in order to be prolonged in another dimension. Through asceticism, love or death the characters search for the ultimate level, the one organically linked with the paradisiacal nostalgia where the primordial Being enjoyed the attributes of Oneness. Talking about his novels, Eliade himself admitted that each of them 'is penetrated, more or less explicitly, by the Paradise Nostalgia, by the reintegration of the primordial unity, by "the exit from Time".' ('străbate, mai mult sau mai puțin explicită, Nostalgia Paradisului, a reintegrării unității primordiale, a "ieșirii din Timp".')⁴⁵

As with other myths, we can say that the writer Mircea Eliade enriched the meanings of the myth of the androgyne which he analysed as a historian of religions. And to do this he 'camouflaged' the myth in diverse contexts, usually by trapping his characters in this world's illusions. From there they try to find a way towards becoming again what they used to be: autonomous, perfect Beings. Some of them succeed, some do not, but the message of the myth itself remains encrypted there, in the very texture of Eliade's literary fiction.

⁴⁵Eliade, Memorii, vol. II, p.230. The underlining is mine.

JOURNEY TOWARDS CENTRE.

THE LABYRINTH MOTIF

Motto: The last events in Bhawanipore now seemed to me like a long wandering in a labyrinth. I felt that I should not be able to get out of that labyrinth until I should have returned to the 'center'. I must at all costs 'concentrate' myself, regain my true center.

(Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. I, p.189)

The labyrinth is one of the universal motifs which have captured over the years the interest of those involved in religions, philosophy, psychology, metaphysics and the arts. René Guénon¹ considered three aspects of its meanings essential: 1) the function of **permitting or forbidding access**² to a certain place; 2) the symbolic value as **initiatory place**; 3) the role of **defence or protection** (against hostile spirits, human enemies, non-initiates). The first characteristic of **permitting or forbidding access** to a certain place hints at the acceptance of the labyrinth as what we call 'an elaborate organization of the threshold'. The symbolism of the threshold was linked by the experts with the labyrinth, which is situated between life and death, the sacred and the profane, this world and another world, the multiple and the one. Entering a labyrinth - being an experience of a superior, **transcendental** quality - presupposes certain trials. The arbitrary function of a maze must also be remembered: the criterion according to which some are allowed to succeed in reaching its centre or entering

¹Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols...*, pp.142-43.

²As formulated by Jackson Knight.

and leaving it unharmed is yet unknown. Even the fact that some heroes are endowed with supernatural qualities does not guarantee the never foreseeable and always arbitrary success. This stems from the idea of the abolition of all rules, characteristic not only for the labyrinth's enclosure, but for other sacred space in general. The sacred being dangerous, the maze could act as a perpetual obstacle to those 'unprepared' for the journey, while allowing entrance to those designated to accede to full initiation:

The enclosure does not only imply and indeed signify the continued presence of a kratophany or hierophany within its bounds; it also serves the purpose of preserving profane man from the danger to which he would expose himself by entering it without due care. The sacred is always dangerous to anyone who comes into contact with it unprepared, without having gone through the 'gesture of approach' that every religious act demands.³

The 'dialectic of paradoxes', as Eliade named it, arises through what he expressed as concomitant accessibility and inaccessibility, unique and transcendent on the one hand and repeatable on the other.⁴ For Diel, the labyrinth signified the unconscious⁵, while Joseph L. Henderson considers it 'an entangling and confusing representation of the world of matriarchal consciousness'. The latter scholar showed that only those who are ready for an initiation 'into the mysterious world of the collective unconscious'⁶ can traverse it, as the descent into the unconscious is strewn with perils. The initiatory function of the labyrinth was accredited by the majority of the experts (Guénon, Diel, Durand,

³Eliade, Patterns..., pp. 370-71.

⁴ibid., p.384.

⁵Quoted by J. E. Cirlot, Dictionary of Symbols (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p.173.

⁶Henderson, 'Ancient Myths and Modern Man', Man..., ed. Jung, p.117.

Jung, Eliade, etc.). In our opinion a **labyrinthic initiation** is always twofold, consisting of: **a) the 'journey' itself** (in all forms: pilgrimage, descent, ascent, meditation, dance, etc.) which supposes a variety of trials and **b) the discovery of a 'centre'** (in its different acceptations: *axis mundi*, reward, illumination, Self, death). And more than any other symbol, it seems to us that the labyrinth corresponds to a certain need of archaic man to travel, to combine two different worlds at the same time (a familiar one, safe and sure, and an imaginary one, endowed with surprises, with unusual challenges). Thus the journey through the labyrinth, towards its centre becomes **(1) a psychological initiation** (the process of individuation; attainment of Wholeness, Self); **(2) a philosophical one** (life is a whole series of trials, a 'doubled labyrinth'⁷; **(3) a metaphysical one** (the cosmic symbolism attached to the maze) and **(4) a mythical initiation** (of which three types are most common: **heroic, obstetric, cosmogonic**).

Before analysing these four types of initiation in Mircea Eliade's writings, the connection made by researchers between labyrinth and mandala, sand-paintings or other diagrams which appear in many religions and accomplish various functions should be emphasized. We can include here the **diagrams** used in Buddhist funerary ceremonies; the labyrinthic **drawings made upon the ground** in Melanesia, on the island of Malekula⁸ (both types indicating the way towards death's realm); Navajo sand-paintings⁹ (which symbolize the cosmogonic myth); the circular or elliptical labyrinths found in **prehistoric engravings**

⁷We can apply here the concept of Bachelard who used it in his analysis of the imaginary universe of Keyserling (the image of the devoured earth circulating inside the worm is synchronic to the worm's circulation inside the earth). Quoted by Durand, *Structurile...*, p.257.

In this sense we can talk of a man traversing a labyrinth while he is a labyrinth in himself.

⁸Eliade, *Nasteri...*, p.80.

⁹Eliade, *Mitul eternei reintoarceri in Eseuri...*, p.68.

interpreted by Waldemar Fenn as diagrams of heaven, that is 'images of the apparent motions of the astral bodies'¹⁰) or the **mystical charts** in mediaeval architecture (mosaics patterned on the ground which were considered a symbolic substitute for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land¹¹). As Eliade noted, numerous mandalas have a clearly labyrinthic plan and they are also linked to the maze through their double function:

... on the one hand, the insertion inside a *maṇḍala* drawn on the ground is equivalent to an initiation; on the other hand, a *maṇḍala* 'protects' the disciple against any destructive force and helps him to concentrate, to find his own 'centre'.¹²

(... pe de o parte, inserția într-o maṇḍala desenată pe sol echivalează cu o inițiere; pe de alta, maṇḍala îl 'apără' pe discipol împotriva oricărei forțe destructive și îl ajută în același timp să se concentreze, să-și găsească propriul 'centru'.)

Gilbert Durand added the labyrinth's symbol to the series: mandala - flower - house. According to him, a mandala could become 'a pocket sacred space' which 'combines the labyrinthic aspect with the facilitation of ubiquity'¹³. In our view the mandala sublimates the space into a symbol able to remake its transcendent co-ordinates through a meditational expansion. But in general, the significance of mandala seems to correspond more the labyrinth's centre, rather than to the labyrinth itself (in Tibetan, 'mandala' means 'centre'¹⁴). This is also the meaning that psychologists like Raymond de Becker ascribed to mandala by

¹⁰Cirlot, Dictionary..., p.173.

¹¹ibid., p.174.

¹²Eliade, Yoga..., p.195.

¹³Durand, Structurile..., p.306.

¹⁴ibid., p.306.

integrating it in the symbolism of the Self or Wholeness (the first symbols of the Self were the wheel and the circle)¹⁵. But the current interpretations consider mandala a 'chart of the Cosmos or model of the Universe' and the translation of the Sanskrit term made by Kernbach supports this ('mandala' = 'disk', 'circle', 'link', 'astral orbit')¹⁶. Apart from being a 'cosmogram' in Tucci's assertion, the mandala is also a 'psycho-cosmogram', the schema of the disintegration from One to Multiple and of the reintegration from Multiple to One¹⁷. In this sense the interpretation given by M. -L. von Franz (Jung's disciple) is relevant. He records the conclusions of a Tibetan abbot (in a discussion with Jung) that 'the most impressive mandalas in Tibet are built up by imagination or directed fantasy, when the psychological balance of the group is disturbed or when a particular thought cannot be rendered because it is not yet contained in the sacred doctrine and must therefore be searched for'.¹⁸ In these remarks, M. -L von Franz recognizes two basic aspects of the mandala's symbolism: **1) restorer of a previously existing order and 2) creator of something new, unique**. We can say that von Franz applies in his interpretation the 'dialectic of contraries', a dialectic which is also functional in the symbolical structure of the labyrinth. Another important aspect of mandala is its capacity to enhance concentration, making the one who meditates invulnerable to external stimuli. Eliade remarked¹⁹ the analogy of mandalas with labyrinths that guard against 'bad spirits' or concrete enemies. The similarities between the mandala and the labyrinth could

¹⁵ De Becker, Interprétez..., p.135.

¹⁶ Victor Kernbach, Dicționar de mitologie generală (Bucharest, Ed. Stiintifica si enciclopedica, 1989), p.324.

¹⁷ Kernbach, p.324.

¹⁸ M. - L. von Franz, 'The process of individuation' in Man..., ed. by Jung, p.247.

¹⁹ Eliade, Yoga..., p.197.

be brought further, as the mandala helps the yogi to approach his own Self by (a) re-making and mastering the cosmical process (the mandala is an *imago mundi*) or by (b) rediscovering the mandala in his own body (starting from its iconographic 'support')²⁰.

The labyrinth's **initiatory values** we mentioned earlier (**psychological**, **philosophical**, **metaphysical** and **mythical**), could be discovered in Eliade's scientific and literary writings. The **psychological initiation** is based on the identity labyrinth - centre/Self. As Eliade asserted²¹, archaic people organised their ritual life around a centre. It was a response to the need for a reference point *in absoluto*, revealed either through a hierophany or established in a ritualistic way. The main function of the labyrinth was 'in the first and strictest senses of the word, to defend a "centre" '²² and it represented the access - through initiation - to the sacred *par excellence*, to immortality and absolute reality:

The way is arduous and fraught with peril because it is, in fact, a rite for passing from the profane to the sacred, from the passing and illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to god. To reach the 'centre' is to achieve a consecration, an initiation.²³

Discovering the centre of the labyrinth meant reaching the centre of being, of Self. That is why the 'centre' was homologated to the image of the 'house', the 'house' being a direct symbol of the Self.

In the Eliadean novel The Light Dying Away, the main character identifies his life with an 'easy substitute' for the centre: a library. (The

²⁰ibid., p. 197.

²¹Eliade, Jurnal..., vol. I, p. 343.

²²Eliade, Patterns..., p. 381.

²³ibid., p. 382.

library bears the connotations of a maze in the literary imagination)²⁴. Following the burning of the library (equivalent to an illumination at the sacred level and with the beginning of the hero's blindness on the profane one), Cesare starts an initiatory journey towards the sea. On his way, the librarian who lived only among books and manuscripts encounters different people, the temptation of glory and profane love, obstacles and dangers which he overcomes with stubbornness, continuing his path towards his real Self. As M. -L. von Franz wrote²⁵, the process of individuation, that is the conscious coming-to-terms with one's own inner centre (psychic nucleus) or Self, begins in general with 'a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it'. This is precisely the case with Cesare, suddenly finding himself in the maze of the profane life, which he always thought of in nearly mythical, chivalrous terms:

'I predicted so many gates, so many padlocks, so many walls, so many roads', continued Cesare, enthusiastic and rhetorical. 'When I say "world", I do not mean precisely the city with electrical advertisements, bars and brothels. I envisage riddles or the epic, yes *the epic*, and in a certain senses I left like a knight; my soul was then full of middle ages...'²⁶

('Prevedeam atâtea porți, atâtea lacăte, atâtea ziduri, atâtea drumuri', continua înflăcărat și retoric Cesare. 'Când spun "lume", nu înțeleg numaidecât orașul cu reclame electrice, baruri și bordeluri. Văd ghicitori sau epică, da *epică*, și într-un anumit sens am plecat ca un cavaler: sufletul mi-era pe atunci plin de evul mediu...')

The process of renouncing his old personality is painful, but finally Cesare succeeds in attaining his Self, symbolised by the image of the sea. In the short story 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats', the main

²⁴See Jorge Luís Borges's short stories, Umberto Eco's, *The Name of the Rose*, etc.

²⁵M.-L.von Franz, 'The process of individuation', *Man...*, ed. by Jung, p.169.

²⁶Eliade, *Lumina...*, vol. I, (1991), p.109.

character Farama always gets lost: in the labyrinth of profane space and in that of his own Self. Farama, as a character endowed with sacrality, has more Self 'centres'. This explains why he seems to lose the thread of his stories, like a 'degraded' Theseus. 'Amnesia', 'hot weather', 'forgetfulness' are just 'signs' of the sacred's intermingling with the profane.

The philosophical type of initiation is based on the idea of the identity labyrinth-life. In his conversation with Claude Henri-Rocquet, Eliade expressed his view on the maze:

... I think the labyrinth is the image of initiation par excellence... On the other hand, I consider that any human existence is made from a series of initiatory trials; man makes himself through a succession of unconscious initiations.²⁷

(... eu cred că labirintul este imaginea prin excelență a inițierii... Pe de altă parte consider că orice existență omenească este alcătuită dintr-o serie de încercări inițiatice; omul se face printr-un șir de inițieri inconștiente).

In addition, the metaphor of the title, The Labyrinth's Trial, represents for the historian of religions an exact expression of the human condition.²⁸ What Eliade brings with this concept is his idea that there is always an exit from a labyrinth and this exit is of a transcendental nature. Time and space are abolished and the way 'out' becomes a synonym for freedom and ultimate reality. In his fiction, the characters are trapped in multiple labyrinths and gradually the function of the 'centre' is taken by the transcendental opening, as a unique solution to life's continuous trials:

²⁷Mircea Eliade, Încercarea labirintului (Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Dacia, 1990), p.31.

²⁸ibid., p.31.

When man attains his own centre he becomes enriched, his consciousness becomes larger and more profound, everything becomes clarified, significant: but life continues: another labyrinth appears, another trials, other types of trials, on another level...²⁹

(Când omul își atinge centrul se îmbogățește, conștiința îi devine mai largă și mai profundă, totul se limpezește, devine semnificativ: dar viața continuă: se ivește alt labirint, alte încercări, alte feluri de încercări, la alt nivel...)

Caught in an existential maze, the characters from The Return from Paradise and The Hooligans try to find their 'centre' through adopting 'hooliganism' (an existential philosophy whose main characteristic consisted in experiencing everything to the ultimate; even if that supposed suicide, or murder). Entangled in the existential labyrinth represented by the love of two women, Pavel Anicet (The Return from Paradise) kills himself in an act of protest against life's limits. Another character David Dragu approaches his existential maze (strewn with poverty, cheap eroticism, exhausting jobs) differently: he creates (writing books and articles). In The Hooligans (a continuation of The Return from Paradise), Petru Anicet represents the image of the failed artist who lives off a prostitute's earnings. He also tempts another girl to steal jewellery from her parents, indirectly causing the death of his own mother, who, ashamed, kills herself. It could be asserted that Eliade's characters, instead of trying to overcome the vicissitudes of the human condition, take a masochistic duty in increasing their own degradation to the final limit, where either the trials themselves are annihilated or the experiments destroy the heroes. Other protagonists, captive in the maze of existence, forget their 'true' identity and 'real' destiny, 'true' and 'real' here meaning 'sacred'. A transcendental exit is the only way of attaining the Self and it is always a certain experience

²⁹ibid., p.157.

(love, revelation) that triggers the characters' search through the meandering path of space, time and memories.

In the novel The Forbidden Forest, Stefan wanders through the labyrinth of the profane life, looking for a transmundane escape, a search that is transformed into his existential goal, while life in itself acquires the connotation of an eschatology. The way out of this maze becomes equivalent to illumination (he feels lost again when another labyrinth appears):

'You know', he suddenly started again, 'there, in the labyrinth, I felt enclosed from all sides... I was feeling condemned for the rest of my life to spin blindly, in vain, inside this sphere, as in the darkness of a labyrinth. However, one day, nearly without noticing it... I arose again in the light, I got out of the labyrinth...'³⁰

('Știi, reîncepu el brusc, 'acolo, în labirint, mă simțeam închis din toate părțile... Mă simțeam condamnat pentru tot restul vieții să mă învârt, orbește, zadarnic, înăuntrul sferei acesteia, ca în întunericul unui labirint. Și, totuși, într-o zi, aproape fără să-mi dau seama... am ieșit din nou la lumină, am ieșit din labirint...')

After getting out of the 'labyrinth-sphere', Stefan realizes that in fact there were many apertures in it. This image fits in with the historians of religions' idea³¹ that a transcendent space allows the existence of a multiplicity or infinity of 'centres':

'Now, when I got out from the labyrinth', Stefan started again with a more detached voice, 'I understood that that sphere which seemed endless and inaccessible was, in fact, broken in different places. But evidently, I was not realizing that it was broken, that one could have got out of those holes, that each opening was a window. One could always jump out, on the window...'³²

³⁰Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. I, (1991), p.254.

³¹Eliade, Patterns..., p.379.

³²Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. I (1991), p.257.

('Acum, că am ieșit din labirint', reîncepu Ștefan cu un glas mai detașat, 'am înțeles că sfera aceea care mi se părea nesfârșită și inaccesibilă era, de fapt, spartă în diferite locuri. Dar, evident, nu-mi dădeam seama că era spartă, că prin toate acele spărturi se putea ieși, că fiecare spărtură era o fereastră. Puteai oricând sări afară, pe fereastră...')

The same type of existential maze appears in Eliade's novel Nineteen Roses, and, as in The Forbidden Forest, it is a woman who brings the final revelation to the hero. In this book life becomes a labyrinth which at the same time 'admits' and 'forbids' entrance. Nineteen Roses is constructed from many labyrinths of which those centred on life, art and love are pivotal. But the ultimate sacred maze becomes 'open' for Pandele only, while remaining 'closed' for his young assistant, Eusebiu Damian. As a consequence, in the last initiatory trial, Pandele, the famous writer, disappears in a sledge drawn by horses on the snow (a symbol of death), while Damian is found later in the snow, half frozen. The facts follow the dialectic of the maze: 'The labyrinth, like any other trial of initiation, is a difficult trial in which not all are fitted to triumph.'³³ Nineteen Roses introduces the idea of continuation between the two labyrinths (the 'sacred' and the 'profane'). The relationship between the spiritual master and his assistant - each in a different existential labyrinth after the former's disappearance - does remain a sort of 'feedback' relationship. From the sacred labyrinth ('the other realm'), flashing revelations (e.g. bunches of roses) are sent into the profane one, and the profane maze sends 'messages' into the sacred one. The labyrinths are interconnected in certain places like communicating vessels (the affectionate link between Pandele and his assistant continues).

The third type of initiation, the metaphysical one, is based on two identities: **labyrinth/cosmos** and **labyrinth/underworld**. The maze

³³Eliade, Patterns..., p.381.

was considered by primitives, as we saw earlier, an image of the cosmos, a cosmogram; (from this springs the analogy they made between the labyrinth and the cosmogonic myth, which we will analyse later in the chapter. In many religions the Creator is envisaged as a 'Primordial Weaver' or a 'Cosmic Spider'³⁴. From this idea sprang the representation of cosmos under the form of a spider web. Māyā, the Hindu concept of the world caught in a web of appearances, is part of this series. There is an obvious similarity between the organization of the labyrinth (always endowed with a 'centre') and the pattern of the cobweb which triggers the equivalence: cosmos = life = labyrinth = maya. This identity can be encountered in the literary works of Eliade: The Light Dying Away and The Forbidden Forest. A 'claustration'-syndrome is attached to both labyrinth and spider's web (and ultimately to life). We could assert that the Eliadean characters suffer from 'life's claustrophobia'. The main hero's thoughts in The Light Dying Away express this idea of people entangled in the labyrinth of existence, in a web of illusions:

And they wake up again, caught in the spider's web. An invisible web, but an internal one, inside the depths - never outside. And the spider weaves. When he stops his work, the cobweb thrills in the wind, the eyes are blurred, and outside, on the street, people appear like shadows. And they begin again.³⁵

(Și iarăși se deșteaptă, prinși în pânza de păianjen. O pânză invizibilă, dar înlăuntru, în adânc - niciodată în afară. Iar păianjenul țese. Când se oprește din lucru, pânza se înfioară în vânt, ochii văd tulbure, și în afară, pe străzi, oamenii par umbre. Și iarăși încep.)

³⁴... the situation of the Primordial Weaver is analogous to the one of the Cosmic Spider; he is assimilated either to the Sun, to a transpersonal principle (ātman-Brahman), or to a personal God. But, whatever his nature, or the form under which he manifests himself, the Creator is, in all contexts, a "weaver"; which means that he keeps tightened by him, through invisible threads or ropes, the Worlds and the beings he produces...'. Eliade, Mefistofel..., p.166.

³⁵Eliade, Lumina..., vol. II (1991), p.49.

But māyā is made possible by the existence of time. Consequently the abolition of time triggers the abolition of a Great Illusion: life's labyrinth. Abolishing time means for Eliade the annulment of the profane perspective. Biris, the philosopher from The Forbidden Forest, comments on Narada's story to his friend Stefan from this particular standpoint:

Vishnu wants only to show him that Māyā, the cosmic illusion, is possible exclusively because of Time, that Māyā could manifest itself because of the temporal duration. I thought this was your opinion as well; a long time ago you told me that existence in Time is illusory, insignificant, unreal. You were saying to me that the only escape is the exit from historical Time. Vishnu proves you right: he tells you clearly that Time is illusion, is Māyā...³⁶

(Visnu vrea doar să-i arate ca Maya, iluzia cosmică, e posibilă datorită exclusiv Timpului, că Maya se poate manifesta grație duratei temporale. Ori eu credeam că aceasta e și părerea ta; pe vremuri îmi spuneai că existența în Timp e iluzorie, ne semnificativă, ireală. Spuneai că singura scăpare este ieșirea din Timpul istoric. Visnu îți dă dreptate: îți spune limpede că Timpul e iluzie, e Maya...)

The same identity life = labyrinth = māyā appears in the short story 'Nights at Serampore' as well. A group of three friends: Van Manen, Bogdanof and the narrator get lost in a jungle and are caught in the revival of a 'scene' from XVIIIth century. They not only witness the preliminaries of a murder, but enter into the event and consequently change it. Their power of intervention is explained by the general perception that all happenings, Time and History are but the facets of a Great Illusion and consequently they could be re-created and modified (through Tantric magic for example). And it is not mere chance that Eliade projects his characters in their new situation by making them first wander through the labyrinth of the jungle:

³⁶Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. II, p.202.

I had always the impression that the car took a wrong turn and that we should already have had to get out, long before, into the wide road. I wasn't well aware of what happened, but it seemed to me that I couldn't recognize the landscape any longer. This feeling, that we lost our way, didn't occur to me suddenly but in a gradual way. I couldn't recognize anything around me. It was as if we found ourselves in a totally different part of Bengal,...³⁷

(Aveam mereu impresia că mașina apucase pe un drum greșit și că ar fi trebuit de mult să ieșim în șoseaua cea mare. Nu-mi dedeam bine seama ce se întâmplă, dar mi se părea că nu mai recunosc peisajul. Impresia asta că răătăcisem drumul n-am primit-o brusc, ci se precizase în etape... Nu recunoșteam nimic din jurul meu. Parcă ne-am fi găsit în cu totul altă parte a Bengalului,... .)

Only in the next morning, exhausted after their adventure in the jungle, do they find out that their car did not in fact leave the bungalow and that Nilamvara's house, which they 'discovered' the previous night, disappeared long ago. The protagonists come to understand that they were caught in the labyrinth of a Tantric rite performed by the yogi Suren Bose. If yoga stands for a way of weaving a web of appearances, it could also express a way of salvation from the existential maze. In his autobiography Eliade states that in India he felt like a prisoner in a labyrinth and he had to struggle hard to concentrate and regain his true centre. In this respect yoga became a guide through the 'passions, temptations, and distractions' of life:

The yogic meditations and techniques that I had studied with Dasgupta in the classic texts, ... had persuaded me once more that they were the result of an extraordinary knowledge of the human condition. Only somebody who truly knew the passions, temptations, and distractions of the one 'caught in the net of existence' could have evolved all those psycho-physiological techniques that constituted yoga.³⁸

³⁷Eliade, 'Nopti la Serampore', *Secretul...*, vol. II, p.65.

³⁸Mircea Eliade, *Memorii*, vol. I (Bucharest, Ed. Humanitas, 1991), p.207.

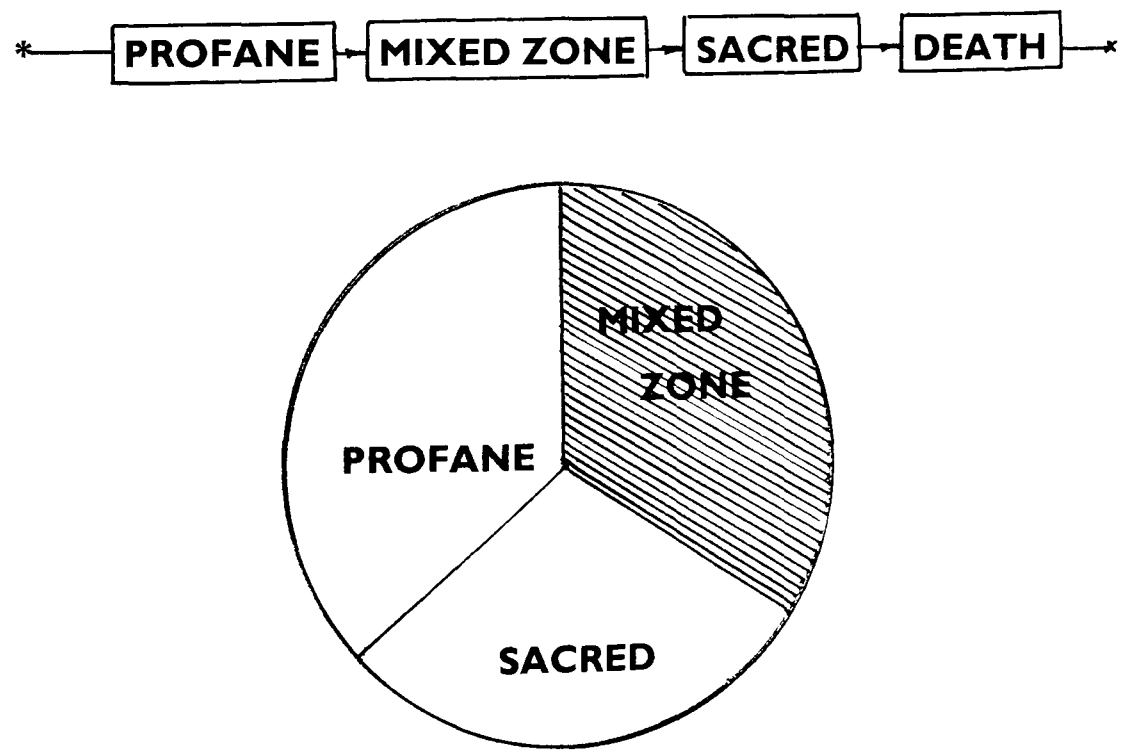
(Meditațiile și tehnicile yoghine, pe care le studiasem cu Dasgupta în textele clasice, ... m-au convins încă o dată că erau rezultatul unei extraordinare cunoașteri a condiției umane. Numai cineva care cunoscuse cu adevărat pasiunile, ispitele și distracțiile celui 'prins în mrejele existenței' putuse elabora toate acele tehnici psihofiziologice care alcătuiesc yoga.)

The second identity on which the metaphysical initiation is based is the one labyrinth - underworld. The academics agreed that in many traditions the maze was a symbolic representation of the underworld. Mircea Eliade wrote: 'Entering and successfully traversing a labyrinth, without being lost in its mazes, is tantamount to a *descensus as infernos* followed by a triumphant return to our world; thus constituting a successful initiation'³⁹. (He also expresses this view in treatises like: Shamanism - Archaic techniques of ecstasy, p.51; Istoria credintelor si ideilor religioase vol. I, p.135, etc.) In his literary writings he used this idea in short stories as: 'Ivan', 'The Bridge', 'The Ditches', 'With the Gypsy Girls', 'Dayan', 'At Dionysus' Court'. The structure of these writings (with the exception of 'The Ditches') is based on a simple schema: certain characters get lost and they enter an unfamiliar labyrinthic space endowed with an initiatory value. The centre of the maze is always Death, but the function of this 'centre' is expressed as an accomplishment of the characters' unfulfilled desires. Consequently Death is camouflaged under the form of: a return Home ('Ivan', 'The Bridge'); a long-cherished love ('With the Gypsy Girls', 'At Dionysus' Court'); or an intellectual illumination ('Dayan').

In the short story 'Ivan', whose plot is set during the Second World War, a group of three Romanian soldiers are retreating from Ukraine, hiding in corn-fields in order to avoid the Russian army. Finding a dying Russian soldier, they attempt to carry him to the nearest village. When

³⁹Eliade, Symbolism..., p.165..

he dies, instead of rushing on towards their country, they stop to bury him. During this episode, the commander of the group, called Darie, gets hurt and the whole retreat turns into an eschatological journey towards the Great River. They lose their way and realize that they have returned to where they started from: that is, close to Ivan's tomb, which becomes a transcendental centre. Only in the last pages does the reader apprehend that Darie had been dead for some time. The structure is characteristic of Eliade's stories, which start with a profane journey, followed by a zone where the profane and sacred mingle, to end with detachment from the sacred world and death. The schema is linear (in other writings) or circular (as in 'Ivan'):



The starting point, the death of Ivan, corresponds to the ending point, the death of Darie. If in a profane space they are enemies, on a transcendental level they are both part of the same cosmic identity.

Darie tells this to the dying Ivan, in a philosophical way: 'I understood that it is not necessary to go somewhere, because *you are already there*'. ('Am inteles ca nu e nevoie sa te duci undeva, pentru ca *esti deja acolo*.')⁴⁰

In the short story 'The Bridge' the labyrinth is the world itself which must be traversed by an old dying woman and a girl. The old woman did not want to die in just any place, and expressed the wish 'to return home, to die in her country, to be buried there, in their earth' ('sa se intoarca acasa, sa moara la ea in tara, sa fie inmormantata acolo, in pamantul lor').⁴¹ In order to help her, a young girl leads the woman on the 'way', guided by a 'map' and a 'book'. Obviously the book is the Bible, as one of the characters suggests:

Yes, this book - I do not know its title, I do not know who had written it - this book had in fact a simple subject. it was about home, about the return home - to your house, I want to say, wherever that may be.⁴²

(Da, cartea aceasta - nu știu ce titlu avea, nu știu cine o scrisese - cartea aceasta avea în fond un subiect simplu. Era vorba despre casa, despre întoarcerea acasă - la tine acasă, vreau să spun, oriunde s-ar fi întâmplat să fi avut casa.)

Their journey is an initiatory one, as the 'map' indicates the crossing of restaurants, banks, schools, hospitals. The frame-story of the old woman includes many other stories, all of them centred on the idea of life as labyrinth and game:

⁴⁰Eliade, 'Ivan', In Curte..., p.370.

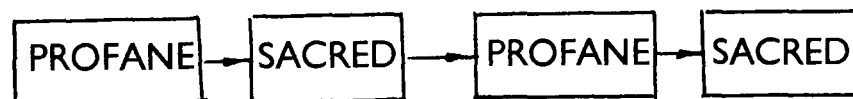
⁴¹ibid., p.184.

⁴²ibid., p.184.

You pass from a garden into another one, from a forest into another, but until you get out from the mill the game is the same, you always meet other couples, other groups, and if you delay too long or forget one of the game's rules, you get lost...⁴³

(Treci dintr-o grădină într-alta, dintr-o pădure într-alta, dar până ce nu ieși din moară jocul e același, întâlnești mereu alte perechi, alte grupuri, și dacă întârzi prea mult ~~sa~~ uiți una din regulile jocului, te ratacesti...)

In the story 'The Ditches' the labyrinth is represented by the ditches/trenches themselves, dug by a group of countrymen in search of a hidden treasure. They hold the belief that the oldest man in the village cannot die until a certain 'treasure' is disinterred. Eliade found in this writing the labyrinth's perfect formula: situated between two worlds, the trenches being neither in this world nor in the underworld. His masterpiece in the genre, 'With the Gypsy Girls', is entirely organized on the symmetrical structure of a labyrinth, the profane-sacred transition being nearly imperceptible:



Not only is the syntactic structure of the novella meandering itself, but the main character, the piano teacher Gavrilesco, gets lost in the Gypsies' house, a real initiatory maze. Every room constitutes a sort of mini-labyrinth made of curtains, mirrors, folding screens:

⁴³ibid., p.194.

It looked as if it was not the same room anymore, but he still recognized the screens, asymmetrically put among armchairs, divans or mirrors, those folding screens which had impressed him as he entered... Some of them, very tall, nearly touching the ceiling, could have been mistaken for walls... Others, mysteriously lit, looked like windows, half covered in curtains, opened towards interior corridors. Other screens, multicoloured and curiously painted, or covered in shawls and embroideries which fell in waves on the carpets, mixing up with them, were forming... alcoves of different shapes and sizes.⁴⁴

(Parcă nu mai era aceeași încăpere, și totuși recunoștea, așezate simetric printre fotolii, divane sau oglinzi, paravanele care-l impresionaseră de cum intrase. Unele foarte înalte, aproape atingând tavanul, s-ar fi confundat cu pereții... Altele, misterios luminate păreau a fi ferestre, pe jumătate acoperite cu perdele, deschizându-se spre coridoare interioare. Alte paravane, multicolor și curios pictate, sau acoperite cu șaluri și broderii care cădeau în falduri pe covoare, confundându-se cu ele alcătuiau, s-ar fi spus prin felul cum erau așezate, alcovuri de diferite forme și mărimi.)

The apparently profane closed space acquires a labyrinthic initiatory value (see also the room with antiques of Iancu Antim in The Forbidden Forest and the garret in 'A General's Uniforms'). But Gavrilescu keeps making mistakes in all the trials he is subjected to: he always takes wrong turns and he is not able to guess the 'real Gypsy' among the three girls, letting himself be guided by appearances. Consequently he is punished and his access to the 'centre', to sacredness and real understanding is forbidden. Even his death is like a dream (although the woman he loved in the profane world accompanies him in a supreme fulfilment of his destiny).

The opposite of Gavrilescu (from 'With the Gypsy Girls') is Dayan (from 'Dayan'). This character is a 'chosen one', initiated by the Wandering Jew - the traveller *par excellence* - and he accedes to the 'centre'. The hero is led by the mythical personage in a journey in time. At a certain point Ahashverus addresses Dayan:

⁴⁴Eliade, 'La tiganci', In Curte..., p.24.

But let us get out of this labyrinth... As you can see: houses which existed once and burnt down or were demolished were replaced by other houses, planned in another way, so that sometimes we are suddenly in a boulevard or in a garden.⁴⁵

(Dar să ieșim din labirintul ăsta... După cum vezi: case care au fost cândva și au ars, sau au fost dărâmate, și pe locul lor s-au ridicat alte case, dar altfel plănuite, așa că uneori ne trezim pe un bulevard sau într-o grădină.)

During this tour, guided by the one condemned to an eternal journey in the labyrinth of an endless life, the mathematician Dayan acquires universal wisdom and finds the answer to the ultimate equation which integrates the binome Matter - Energy in the system Space - Time (that is, Time could be compressed not only forwards, but backwards as well). At the end of the novella, Dayan leaves his guide and goes towards his own 'centre'. Asked by Ahashverus if he knows the way, he answers: 'I know it,... . And I know the place too. It's not far... ('Il cunosc,... . Și cunosc și locul. Nu e departe...')⁴⁶.

In the short story 'At Dionysus' Court', a poet (Adrian) and a singer (Leana), search for each other in the eschatological labyrinth of a hotel. (The hotel, with its floors, exhibitions, circular places, mirrors and corridors, camouflages the sacred under profane appearances.) The maze acquires a vertical dimension as well, the elevator having the role to 'project' people at different levels. The centre of the labyrinth is represented by the 'rotunda' with mirrors. Adrian loses his way and suffers from amnesia. He can no longer remember whom he has to meet and where, but, guided by a strange force within himself he reaches the 'centre'. Seeing Leana, he understands that it is she for whom he was looking and that she is in fact the Angel of Death. They re-edit the mythical couple Orpheus-Eurydice and overcome - through

⁴⁵Eliade, 'Dayan', La Umbra..., vol. V, p.138.

⁴⁶ibid., p.183.

art and mythology - the disequilibrium and anguish of the modern world (equated to the Underworld), which has lost its sacred dimension. The idea is also expressed in Eliade's scientific book, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries:

... the modern world is in the situation of a man swallowed by a monster and who struggles in the darkness of its stomach, or a man lost in the jungle, or lost in a labyrinth which also symbolizes the Underworld - and he is anguished, he thinks he is already dead or going to die and he does not see around him any exit but darkness, Death, Nothingness.⁴⁷

... lumea modernă se află în situația unui om înghițit de un monstru și care se zbate în întunericul pântecului acestuia, sau pierdut în junglă, sau rătăcit într-un labirint care simbolizează și el Infernul - și este angoasat, se crede deja mort sau pe punctul de a muri și nu vede în jurul lui nici o ieșire decât întuneric, Moarte, Neant.)

The fourth type or initiation into the labyrinth is the **mythical one**. In Eliade's fiction, it can be said that three types of myths linked with the maze are recurrent: 1) **the heroic**; 2) **the obstetric** and 3) **the cosmogonic**. The labyrinth is hard to access, as it symbolizes absolute reality and sacred power. As Mircea Eliade wrote: 'Symbols of this sort are situated in a "centre"; in other words they are always closely guarded and to get them is equivalent to... a "heroic" or "mystical" conquest of immortality.'⁴⁸. Amongst the mythical figures re-edited by Eliade's literary characters are: **Christ, Ulysses, Theseus/Ariadne, Orpheus/Eurydice**.

In the novel The Light Dying Away the main hero Cesare, through his periplus towards the sea and his own Self, goes back in time, until he reaches the myth: 'The way was endless and Cesare's thoughts were jumping the years' ditches with a prodigious elasticity and freshness.'

⁴⁷Eliade, Mituri, vise și mistere în Eseiuri..., p.159.

⁴⁸Eliade, Patterns..., pp.380-81

('Drumul era nesfârșit și gândurile lui Cesare săreau șanțurile anilor cu o prodigioasă elasticitate și frăgezime.')⁴⁹. He acquires some of **Christ's** attributes: he gives the impression that he walks on the water, and his whole attitude and gestures are reminiscent of Jesus. Mr George, the journalist, understood that Cesare is a prisoner in labyrinths of multiple worlds, as the Son of God was: 'He keeps silent though. Even if he is insulted and sorrowful, he does not protest, but he does not resign either. I guess he is in a permanent resurrection, but he never uncovers himself.' ('Și totuși tace. Deși e insultat și obidit, nu protestează, dar nu se resemnează. Il ghicesc în permanentă resurecție, și totuși nu se descoperă niciodată.')⁵⁰. In the end, after Manoil (Cesare's negative double) commits suicide, Cesare becomes aware that he is punished to relive Cain's destiny. Blind, he is condemned to an eternal wandering through darkness, through the labyrinth of his own Self, equivalent to a perpetual nightmare. In Eliade's discussions with the architect Claude Henri-Rocquet, the latter observed that in Eliade's Autobiography two images appear to be emblematic for his life: the **labyrinth** and **Ulysses**, two 'double images'. The historian of religions admitted that for him Ulysses represented:

... not only the modern man's prototype, but also that of the man linked to the future, because he is the type of the hunted traveller. His journey is a journey towards the centre, towards Ithaca, in other words towards his own self. He was a good navigator, but destiny - better expressed, the initiatory trials from which he has to emerge triumphant - constrain him to endlessly postpone his return home...⁵¹

⁴⁹Eliade, Lumina..., vol. I (1991), p.25.

⁵⁰ibid., vol. II, p.105.

⁵¹Eliade, Incercarea..., p.85.

(... prototipul omului, nu numai modern, dar și al omului legat de viitor, pentru că este tipul călătorului haituit. Călătoria sa este o călătorie spre centru, spre Ithaca, cu alte cuvinte, spre sine însuși. El era un bun navigator, dar destinul - mai bine zis încercările inițiatice din care trebuie să iasă biruitor - îl constrânge mereu să-și amâne întoarcerea acasă...)

In his novel The Forbidden Forest, the main character, Stefan, an alter ego of Eliade himself, assumes the condition of a mythical hero. The trials he undergoes have an evident initiatory value; he is chased, tempted, bewitched, many times lost in the labyrinth of the profane space, but every happening reveals a different meaning of existence and another form of freedom to him. (The same way Camus discovered in Sisyphus a conqueror of freedom, so too we can consider Ulysses a maritime Wandering Jew 'chosen' by gods and 'condemned' to spiritual enlightenment by his eternal navigation.) One of Stefan's trials is his encounter with the charming Miss Zissu. Perceiving the fact that this love affair is yet another temptation he has to overcome, Stefan 'transposes' it in mythological terms:

... You are one of these two semi-divine beings: Calypso or Circe. And I, in this moment, I am one of the infinite variants of Ulysses, one of those millions of heroes who repeat, from Homer onwards, a more or less dramatic Odyssey on their way towards home...⁵²

(... Ești una din aceste două ființe semi-divine: Calypso sau Circe. Iar eu, în acest moment, sunt una din infinitele variante ale lui Ulyse, unul din acele milioane de eroi care repetă, de la Homer încolo, o mai mult sau mai puțin dramatică odisee în drumul lor spre casă...)

He finally attains his own 'centre', through his joint death with Ileana, his symbolic Penelope. There are many Eliadean narratives in which the author makes this equivalence between a loved, 'predestined' woman

⁵²Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. II (1991), p.56.

and death. She becomes the messenger of death *par excellence* because love only could be so powerful as to annihilate death's negative meaning.

In one of his theories Eliade asserts that myths bear truths eternally valid for people of all times (a 'desacralized society is only apparently 'profane', as the 'sacred' did not disappear, but was disguised). The significance of myths and their messages becomes universal:

The supreme rite of initiation is to enter a labyrinth and return from it, and yet every life, even the least eventful, can be taken as the journey through a labyrinth. The sufferings and trials undergone by Ulysses were fabulous, and yet any man's return home has the value of Ulysses' return to Ithaca.⁵³

What Eliade points out here is that any 'real' existence reproduces in fact the Odyssey, that is the periplus towards Ithaca, towards the centre.⁵⁴

The same ideas are linked with the image of **Theseus**. As Eliade⁵⁵ emphasized, many episodes from Theseus' saga can indeed be equated with initiatory trials. His ritualistic entrance into the sea at the Nereids' castle, his entering into the labyrinth, and his fight with the monster and the elopement with Ariadne could all be translated in initiatory terms. In addition the experts highlighted the crucial role of Ariadne in the maze's trial, as the woman's image and that of the labyrinth are strongly linked⁵⁶. Tom Chetwynd wrote:

⁵³Eliade, *Patterns...*, p.382.

⁵⁴Eliade, *Jurnal...*, vol. I, p.56.

⁵⁵Eliade, *Nasteri...*, pp.143-44.

⁵⁶The symbolical similitude between the female genital apparatus and the labyrinth can also be taken into consideration.

The maze is tricky as nature herself, and it is typical that a feminine figure, the feminine forces in life - nearer to nature, and nearer to the unconscious - can outwit it by a very simple device... The feminine powers - whether is an actual woman or discovered within the man - are the subtle guide through the regions of the unconscious.⁵⁷

In his fiction Eliade also used the initiatory meanings of this myth. The hero (Adrian) from 'At Dionysus' Court' is lost in the maze of a hotel, and he has the constant feeling that he either has a clue ('caught a thread' in the Romanian translation) of the events, or that his 'thread', that is, his guidance, is temporarily lost. Eliade mixes various myths and motifs in the same story, and a great part of his literature's quality resides in the skill with which he does this. As a result the same couple could simultaneously impersonate other mythical couples: Orpheus/Eurydice, Adrian/Leana, Theseus/Ariadne. What Eliade suggests through this literary technique is that the myths constitute a pattern for certain situations which keep repeating themselves in different contexts. The basic idea could be expressed by 'the same play, different actors' or the *mise-en-scène* concept. The amnesiac Adrian explains to an old man that he is guided by a 'thread' which breaks from time to time:

Because somewhere, I don't know when... *the thread broke*. And when the lady from the elevator brought the laureate painter and the exhibition window from the Catalan hall into discussion I nearly caught the thread again, but something happened and it broke again.⁵⁸

(Pentru că undeva, nu știu când, ... *s-a rupt firul*. Și când doamna din ascensor a adus vorba de pictorul laureat și de vitrina de lângă sala catalană, eram gata-gata să prind din nou firul, dar s-a întâmplat ceva și iar s-a rupt.)

⁵⁷Tom Chetwynd, *Dictionary of Symbols* (London, Aquarian/Thornsons, 1993), p.256.

⁵⁸Eliade, *In Curte...*, p.511.

There is a certain mythological continuity between the myth of Theseus and the one of **Dionysus/Orpheus**, as Ariadne plays a part in both of them (Theseus escapes with Ariadne and sails away towards the island of Naxos, but he abandons her while she sleeps . It is Dionysus⁵⁹ who discovers her, falls in love and weds her.)

The **labyrinth initiation** also supposes an **obstetrical** experience for the one entering it. The symbolic identity between the structure of the female sexual organs and the maze is obvious. It can be said that the labyrinth constitutes every man's pre-natal initiation at a subconscious level (the centre could also be assimilated to the umbilicus). The relationship: umbilicus - centre of the world - *axis mundi* had already been demonstrated by Eliade. We can thus assert that the trial of the labyrinth represents the first psychological test of mankind. It is probable that the rites of passage and funerary rites of archaic man were based on precisely this amniotic experience:

... the labyrinth corresponded to the body of Mother-Earth. To enter a labyrinth or a cavern was equivalent to a mystical return into Mother's bosom - a purpose of both initiation rituals and funerary rituals. Jackson Knight's researches showed how it was with great difficulty that this symbolism of the labyrinth equated to the body of a telluric Goddess disappeared.⁶⁰

(... labirintul era omologat cu trupul Pământului-Mamă. A pătrunde într-un labirint sau într-o cavernă echivala cu o reîntoarcere mistică în sanul Mamei - scop urmărit atât de riturile de inițiere cât și de riturile funerare. Cercetările lui Jackson Knight au arătat cât de greu a dispărut acest simbolism al labirintului valorizat ca trupul unei zeițe telurice.)

The 'obstetric initiation' derived from the Magna Mater (Great Mother) myth can be found in Eliade's novel The Forbidden Forest. The principal character envisages his existential labyrinth in the form of a sphere and

⁵⁹The link between Orpheus and Dionysus will be tackled in a special chapter.

⁶⁰Eliade, Mituri, vise si mistere, in Eseuri..., p.260.

links the image of his lover with a cellar (equivalent to both 'cavern' and 'labyrinth') and a forest (another symbol for the maze).

Moreover, the labyrinth can be interpreted as an initiation into the **cosmogonic myth**. The maze is the very symbol of a new world's restoration: a sublimated depiction of the appearance of the world by springing from a 'centre'. As Mircea Eliade demonstrated in his scholarly writings, 'the creation of the world is the exemplar for all constructions'⁶¹. In his fiction some labyrinths, through which his heroes wander, bear a certain resemblance to primordial times, when the world came into being. In the novel The Light Dying Away the existential labyrinth of Cesare, who is nearly blind, starts with a re-creation of the world:

Darkness, not full and thick, but unfolding like the rolls of shadows, now similar to a cage's lattice, then like a strange tapestry of large serpents, gathered together, moving their rings. It was difficult to understand, difficult to find sunrise and sunset in those depths of black oil and violet-blue milk, animated like a legion of larvae.⁶²

(Intuneric, nu plin și gros, ci desfășurat ca suluri de umbre, acum asemenea zăbrelelor de cușcă, acum ca un tapet straniu de șerpi lați, strânși unul în altul și mișcându-se din inele. Era greu să se lămurească, greu să afle răsăritul și apusul în acea albie de păcura și de lapte vânat, însuflețită ca o legiune de larve.)

The theme of the search for 'beginnings', for the mythical time, appears in the short story 'The Ditches'. The whole village searches deep down for a buried 'treasure', for a 'centre'. As we pointed out earlier, the 'ditches' accomplish the function of a double labyrinth (there are two levels - 'upper' and 'lower', a system which we shall call *mangrovic* because of its similarity to the structure of the mangroves, whose roots

⁶¹Eliade, Patterns..., p.379.

⁶²Eliade, Lumina..., vol. I (1991), p.28.

are visible and suggest an upside down image if the upper part of the tree). This sort of labyrinth is special in the way that instead of having a centre to act as *axis mundi*, it is the whole labyrinth - through its very structure - which gains the function of *axis mundi*.

An 'easy substitute' for the labyrinth (Eliade highlights the need man feels to realize archetypes even at the lowest levels of immediate existence, and calls these new forms 'easy substitutes'⁶³) is the mirror in the short story 'A General's Uniforms'. The prodigious child, Ieronim Thanase, enters the 'green cave of the mirror' and discovers a new, magic world while still keeping contact with the other world, the profane one. The mirror's landscape is a primordial one:

He had started to walk in front of the mirror, endlessly discovering other hollows and other rocks and lianas with unwitnessed flowers, and, amongst them, the incredible silhouettes of the guests, with champagne glasses (tall as a boot or large as a bucket) in their hands...⁶⁴

(Începuse să se plimbe prin fața oglinzii, descoperind neconținut alte scorburi și alte stânci, și liane cu flori nemaîntâlnite, și, printre ele, siluetele neverosimile ale invitaților, cu paharele de șampanie (înalte cât o cizmă sau largi cât găleata) în mână... .)

Ieronim finds a mythical world with submarine caves and strange mythological creatures, known to him only. He starts improvising verses about this sacred world and dances. Here we come upon a pivotal idea: the link between **labyrinth** and **dance**. Dance was performed in archaic societies in order **to obtain food**, as a **homage to death** or to **ensure order in the Cosmos**⁶⁵. The choreographic rhythms are sacred and they could become rituals in themselves. Theseus danced in

⁶³ibid., pp.384-85.

⁶⁴Eliade, 'Uniforme de General', *In Curte...*, p.442.

⁶⁵See Eliade, *Mitul eternei reîntoarceri* in *Eseuri...*, p.31.

the Minotaur's labyrinth, and Eliade talks about 'labyrinthic steps' reproduced in rituals. In our opinion not only does dance symbolizes the labyrinth, but the structure of the labyrinth itself produces a choreography. In Eliade's novella, Ieronim dances in the mirror (as we saw, an 'easy substitute' for the maze):

... he had improvised, without noticing, verse after verse, as the melody demanded and as the always different movements of dance forced him, when slow, majestic, almost liturgical, when abrupt, savage, irreverent.⁶⁶

(... improvizase, fără să-și dea seama, vers după vers, așa cum îi cerea melodia și îl sileau mișcările de dans, mereu altele, când lente, majestuoase, aproape liturgice, când abrupte, sălbatece, ireverențioase.)

Eliade's writings are initiatory, and as the labyrinth is the very symbol of initiation, a more or less camouflaged image of the maze could be detected in all of them. But there is also present in his fiction a certain 'maliciousness'⁶⁷ of an author who enjoys making not only his characters wander, but the readers as well. Thus if in his books the happenings are labyrinthian, so is their presentation (several narratives intersect in one piece, the chronological rule is abolished and there is an interplay between several types of space). Apart from this Eliade introduced a new vision of 'labyrinth in labyrinth' which we can call 'superimposed labyrinths'. These are formed from a sacred labyrinth camouflaged/doubled by a profane one. As we saw earlier, Eliade found

⁶⁶Eliade, 'Uniforme de General', In *Curte...*, p.443.

⁶⁷In his dialogue with Claude-Henri Rocquet, Eliade admits his 'literary maliciousness':

C.H.R. 'There is something malicious in the pleasure with which you try to make your interlocutor wander, is there not ?'

M.E. 'It is probably linked with a certain pedagogy; an entirely transparent "story" should not be given to the reader.'

C.H.R. 'Pedagogy and pleasure of the labyrinth ?'

M.E. 'It is, at the same time, an initiatory trial.'

Eliade, *Incercarea...*, p.47.

in the image of the labyrinth an existential symbol and interpreted his own difficult moments in life as initiation trials in the 'maze'. Through mythical knowledge Eliade discovers a way of attaining inner equilibrium and of acquiring a superior consciousness:

Each of us will have something from Ulysses, we search for ourselves like him, hoping to reach home and afterwards, no doubt, by finding again the country, the house, we rediscover ourselves. But, as in the Labyrinth, in any pilgrimage there is a risk of getting lost. If you succeed in leaving the Labyrinth, in finding our house again, then you become another being...⁶⁸

(Fiecare dintre noi va avea ceva din Ulise, ca și el, căutându-ne, sperând să ajungem, și apoi, fără îndoială, regăsind patria, căminul, ne regăsim pe noi înșine. Dar, ca și în Labirint, în orice peregrinare există riscul de a te pierde. Dacă reușești să ieși din Labirint, să-ți regăsești căminul atunci devii o altă ființă.)

⁶⁸ibid., p.86.

SUMMING-UP

Thus the labyrinth's main functions are: 1) permitting and forbidding access to a certain place; 2) initiation; 3) defence or protection. The first characteristic could be placed under Eliade's term of **'dialectic of contraries'**. The second one, the initiatory feature, presents itself, in our opinion, as mainly twofold: as a journey in itself (pilgrimage, descent, ascent, meditation, dance), or else the accent is put on the discovery of a centre (*axis mundi*, reward, illumination, Self, Death). The third property of **defence** or **protection** also develops on two plans of reference: **against real enemies** or **against bad spirits, maleficent influences**.

The initiatory function of the labyrinth is our view mainly: 1) **psychological** (a process of individuation, attainment of Wholeness, Self); 2) **philosophical** (the concept of 'superimposed labyrinth': life in itself is a labyrinth from birth to death, when one loses endlessly his/her self from a psychological point of view; the trials of daily life); 3) **metaphysical** (the cosmic and eschatologic symbolism attached to the maze); 4) **mythical** (three types of recurrent myths: heroic, obstetric and cosmogonic).

The structure of the labyrinths in Eliadean fiction is either linear (profane - mixed zone - sacred - death; profane - sacred - profane - sacred) or circular (profane - mixed zone - sacred - death). Eliade also introduced in his literary writings the labyrinth in the labyrinth, usually a sacred in a profane one.

ELIADEAN CONCEPTS

THE HERMENEUTIC SACRED / PROFANE

Motto: The existence of *homo religiosus*, especially the primitive, is 'open' to the World; during his lifetime, the religious man is never alone, because a part of the world lives inside him.

(Mircea Eliade, Sacral si profanul, p. 143)

I. THEORIES

Starting from the idea that archaic man considered only the sacred as 'real' and exemplary, Eliade made attempts to discover how this particular way of thinking was preserved in modern man's conceptions. He draws the conclusion that the total 'profanization' of the latter is apparent, and what has changed is the angle from which the sacred is perceived. The world 'speaks' to man and the archaic **kratophanies** (manifestations of power), **hierophanies** (manifestations of the holy) or **theophanies** (manifestations of God) are 'camouflaged' in symbols. The sacred undermines the so-called absolute 'institutionalization' of rationalism, in the same way that the subconscious undermines consciousness. Wilson Hudson pointed out that 'a symbol can acquire new meanings as time passes and its cultural context changes, but it will always carry a meaning which transcends cultures and historical moments'.¹ Consequently we could say that modern man has a distinctive advantage. While still perceiving the ancient meaning at a

¹Hudson, 'Eliade's Contributions...', in Tire Shriner... pp. 219-24.

subconscious level, he can create his own world, by enriching the symbols with personal meanings. In this sense we propose the term *personal hierophanies* for those hierophanies unique to each individual, historically determined by his life span, but bearing an universal dimension through their external existential meaning. Eliade had written about a **differently qualitative space** ('There are still privileged places,...: the native land, the place of first love, a street or a corner from the first foreign city seen in adolescence')² or a **differently qualitative time** (e.g. when one listens to Bach's music, when somebody is in love), but in our opinion the ***personal hierophanies*** could be as fleeting as a gesture (e.g. a father's hand on his son's head like a priest's benediction), a certain smell (e.g. the fragrance of basil or the wooden benches in a church), a particular nuance or colour and so forth. Having all these 'personal hierophanies' at his disposal, modern man can construct different worlds. In this acceptation we can talk of a tripartite division of contemporary man's existential dimensions: historical (=profane), universal (= sacred) and 'personal' (=personal mythology).

Returning to Mircea Eliade's scientific research, we should highlight his pivotal idea of the continuity of the sacred (in a 'degraded' form) in today's world:

Indeed, in a desacralized world such as ours, the 'sacred' is present and active chiefly in imaginary universes. But imaginary experiences are part of the total human being. This means that nostalgia for initiatory trials and scenarios, nostalgia deciphered in so many literary and artistic works (including the cinema), reveals modern man's longing for a *renovatio* capable of radically changing his existence.³

²'Mai există locuri privilegiate,...: ținutul natal, locul primei iubiri, o stradă sau un colț din primul oraș străin văzut în tinerețe.' Eliade, *Sacru*..., pp.23-24.

³Mircea Eliade, Foreword, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. I (New York/London, MacMillan Publishing Company/Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1987), p.XI.

So the profane is no longer perceived as such, but as a disguised form of the sacred. Talking about *homo religiosus*, Eliade emphasizes the fact that his duration has an additional cosmic significance, a transhuman structure and consequently his life could be considered 'an open existence'.⁴ Nevertheless, modern man can still discover a mythical cipher during his day-to-day life and can transform ordinary happenings into spiritual acts.

Eliade's dialectic **Sacred / Profane** has been analysed by many scholars. Douglas Allen studied its three aspects: 1) the **separation of the hierophanic object** and the **sacred-profane distinction**; 2) the **paradoxical relationship between the sacred and the profane**; 3) the **evaluation and choice** implied in the dialectic.⁵ What interests us here is the third point of Douglas Allen's interpretation. The scholar stressed⁶ the fact that, caught in the dialectic of hierophanies, *homo religiosus* becomes involved in an 'existential crisis'. While he experiences a hierophany, he has to evaluate two orders of being and make a choice. We do not agree with Douglas Allen's interpretation⁷ of Eliade's view that *homo religiosus*, while 'choosing' the sacred, evaluates his 'ordinary' mode of existence negatively. From our point of view 'ordinary' life represents, for a religious man, a rather impersonal and unimportant pretext for discovering the meaningful, sacred way of being. Only when he succeeds in interweaving the two worlds does his double level of existence become meaningful. Another academic explanation of Eliade's **Sacred / Profane** hermeneutic is given by Norman J. Girardot. The researcher showed that 'it is precisely the mystery of the accidental nature of essence in the human experience of

⁴Eliade, *Sacred...*, p.143.

⁵Douglas Allen, 'Mircea Eliade's Phenomenological Analysis of Religious Experience', in *Journal of Religion*, 1972, vol.52, pp.170-86.

⁶*ibid.*, pp.170-86.

⁷*ibid.*, pp.170-86.

the world that has meaning for Eliade.’⁸ In our opinion this formula defines best the main quality of the ‘hierophanies’. Eliade sought to discover a ‘creative hermeneutics’ based on religion and capable of finding hidden coherences, grammar and narrativity in human history.⁹ History is one of the causes of modern man’s alienation and it is religion which offers a more meaningful interpretation of life. Ultimately the latter could become a soteriology if people are prepared to find the hidden, sacred messages, underneath the banal experiences of secular life. The knowledge of the history of religions form the basis of an ‘educated imagination’¹⁰. This could help man to rediscover the true meaning of existence, underneath the trivial quotidian experiences. As Girardot explained: ‘Knowing myths and stories, then, helps us to remember and recover part of our essential humanity’¹¹. This Eliadean idea was also analysed by Adriana Berger¹² who considered myth and literature instruments of knowledge revealing the world’s sacrality. For Eliade, the world reveals itself through symbolical images, through ‘signs’. These ‘signs’ are similar to the scattered letters of a lost text, which - collected with patience - uncover, interwoven in the pattern of profane life, a totally different meaning of the world. But the ‘signs’ never disclose the entire sacred design. The reason why the sacred manifests itself in an incomplete manner is that the profane no longer has the power to transform itself completely into the sacred. As

⁸Norman J. Girardot, ‘Imagining Eliade: A Fondness for Squirrels’, Imagination and Meaning - The Scholarly and Literary Worlds of Mircea Eliade, ed. by Norman J. Girardot and MacLinscott Ricketts (New York, The Seabury Press, 1982), p.2. The underlining is mine.

⁹ibid., p.3.

¹⁰Term borrowed by Girardot from Northrop Frye (the latter’s book The Educated Imagination).

¹¹Girardot, ‘Imagining Eliade...’, Imagination..., p.13.

¹²Berger, ‘Eliade’s Double Approach...’, Religious..., pp.9-12.

Stephen Reno underlined 'The profane never becomes the sacred'¹³. The 'signs' are in fact symbols which act mainly at the unconscious level of the areligious man of modern society. Through his work, Eliade attempts to make these symbols surge into the 'profane' man's consciousness. With this aim he makes use of religion (that is 'real' knowledge) as an essential tool. We can say that his hermeneutic promotes a form of *integratory/personalized* analysis which employs depth psychology and religion to deepen the understanding of life. Everybody, having a system of meanings at his disposal, can interpret not only his/her own existential dimensions, but can correlate them to the others' and ultimately, integrate their life into a cosmical perspective. This is analogous to mathematical formulas able to solve different problems. Eliade undertook the task of demonstrating how the 'formulas' (symbols, techniques of salvation) work in different contexts and how they could be employed in a personal existential equation:

... the symbol not only 'opens' the world, but helps the religious man to reach the universal. Due to symbols, man goes out of his particular state and 'opens himself' towards the general and universal. Symbols awake individual experience and transform it into spiritual action, into metaphysical mastery of the World.¹⁴

(... simbolul nu numai că 'deschide' lumea, dar îl și ajută pe omul religios să ajungă la universal. Datorită simbolurilor, omul iese din starea sa particulară și 'se deschide' spre general și universal. Simbolurile trezesc experiența individuală și o preschimbă în act spiritual, în stăpânire metafizică a Lumii.)

Eliade compares¹⁵ techniques like those of psychoanalysis with the initiatic descent into Hell, or finds that any human existence is made of a

¹³Stephen J. Reno, 'Eliade's Progressional View of Hierophanies' in Religious Studies, 1972, vol. 8, pp.153-60.

¹⁴Eliade, Sacrul..., p.185.

¹⁵ibid., pp.181-82.

web of trials and encompasses the repeated experience of 'death' and 'revival'. From a religious perspective, he discovers, existence is based on or could become an initiation. Eliade also asserts that modern man still has at his disposal 'an entire hidden mythology' and several 'degraded ritualisms'¹⁶. Some of the 'techniques' allowing the contemporary man an exit from profane time could take multiple forms: **psychoanalytical sessions** (which trigger the process of *anamnesis*), **reading** (which accomplishes a mythological function by being a substitute for recitations of myths in archaic society or for oral literature), **watching a film, day dreaming, listening to music, viewing an art gallery, visiting a foreign country**. And indeed 'any human experience could be transfigured and lived on another, transhuman level' ('orice experientia umana poate fi transfigurata si traita pe un alt plan, transuman').¹⁷ The **paradoxical dialectic of hierophanies** is based on this very possibility whereby any object can become *something else*, while remaining the very same object, eternal and ephemeral at the same time. Even if the disappearance of a conscious religious perspective is equated by Eliade¹⁸ with a 'new Fall', this does not imply that man is not still carrying the subconscious memory of the transcendent world.

¹⁶ibid., p.178.

¹⁷ibid., p.148.

¹⁸ibid., p.185.

2. THE TWO QUALITIES OF SPACE AND TIME

In examining the mechanisms of the Sacred and Profane, Eliade puts forward the concept of **the double quality of Space and Time**. According to him¹⁹, the religious man perceives **space** in a non-homogenous way (it has breaches, some portions of space are qualitatively different from others). Consequently a sacred space - 'powerful', significative - coexists with some other spaces: non-consecrated, without structure or consistency, which Eliade calls 'amorphous'. 'Any sacred space implies a hierophany, an outburst of the sacred'²⁰ and this is the decisive factor in its qualitative metamorphosis. In tackling the problem of sacred space, Eliade dwelt on the importance of the Centre of the World as a vital opening in profane space, which allows the religious man to communicate with transcendency. Without this point of reference, the archaic man felt as disorientated as a modern man without the Greenwich meridian.

Time also assumes a double, profane and sacred quality. The difference between them is the one between 'an evanescent duration and a "series of eternities", periodically retrievable during the feasts which form the sacred calendar.' (' O durată evanescentă și un "șir de veșnicii" periodic recuperabile în timpul sărbătorilor, care alcătuiesc calendarul sacru.')²¹.

Analysing Eliade's writings, Adriana Berger correlates their meanings with the different qualities of Time employed, finding three obvious levels of reading:

¹⁹ibid., p.21.

²⁰ibid., p.25.

²¹ibid., p.92.

... an apparently profane meaning (corresponding to the apparently profane time of the narration in literary writings and to the phenomenological description in the theoretical writings), a mythical meaning (corresponding to the Great Time of myth of both fictional and theoretical writings), and a mystical, religious meaning (corresponding to the No Time of the mystics and the religious in both fictional and theoretical writings).²²

For Eliade the religious man (contrary to the non-religious one) refuses to live in 'history' only and seeks to attain sacred Time which, in his conception, is the only 'real' and relevant Time. According to the scholar, the mythical, sacred Time is a paradigm for existential, historical time. This is the reason for which the religious man considers himself a product of History, like the profane man, with the difference that it is sacred, mythical History that interests him and not human history, which is relevant for the secular man only:

The personal memory does not count: the only important thing is the rememorization of the mythical event, the only one with a creative role. Only primordial myth can preserve real history, the history of the human condition, and only here can the principles and paradigms of any conduct be searched for and found.²³

(Memoria personală nu intră în joc: unicul lucru important este rememorarea evenimentului mitic, singurul cu rol creator. Doar mitul primordial poate păstra istoria adevărată, istoria condiției umane, și doar aici trebuie căutate și găsite principiile și paradigmele oricărui comportament.)

In this context the very concept of 'memory' has to be carefully considered because what a modern man understands by 'memory' is distinct from the archaic meaning. Eliade already pointed out²⁴ the difference between memory (*mnemne*) and recollection (*anamnesis*). For the archaic man, not forgetting what the gods had done in *illo*

²²Berger, 'Eliade's Double Approach...', Religious..., pp.9-12. The underlining is mine.

²³Eliade, Sacral..., p.90.

²⁴Eliade, Myth..., p.119.

tempore is far more important than remembering the acts of his daily, profane life. Furthermore, forgetting the contents of the 'collective memory' (tradition) was equivalent to a 'sin', a disaster, or a retrogression into the 'natural' state.²⁵ This explains why for Eliade 'awakening' is synonymous to indifference towards history, especially contemporary history. In this context only myths - as patterns of human behaviour - are essential:

Only the events that occurred in the past of fable are worth knowing; for, by learning them, one becomes conscious of one's true nature - and awakens...²⁶

²⁵ibid., p.125.

²⁶ibid., p.134.

3. TIME AND SPACE IN LITERATURE

Literature, in Eliade's view, remains one of the modern man's soteriological paths. It takes the place of initiation in archaic societies and triggers the exit from the profane duration and space. As Adriana Berger remarked 'the essence of Eliade's work resides in his desire to return to art - which is in the process of degradation - its true dimension, which is ritualistic and sacred'²⁷. But Eliade is not the only one to link myth and novel: Lévi-Strauss had written about the presence in the contemporary novel of 'résidus déformalisés du mythe'.²⁸ Eliade's fiction though is original because it does not hide mythical structures in the narrative, but portrays the profane world as it is, trying to help the rediscovery of life's lost sacrality. The literary critic Eugen Simion commented on this aspect:

Life is a sum of myths and archetypes which are not seen. The creator of literature must offer the reader, in a discreet way, a code and an itinerary to enable him to understand and orient himself in the world of signs that surrounds him.²⁹

The language of Eliade's literature supposes an 'initiated' reader. With this understanding Eugen Simion employed Gilbert Durand's term of '*lecture mytho-critique*' or Simone Vierre's designation of '*lecture initiatique*'³⁰. Meanwhile Adriana Berger refers to Eliade's oeuvre as belonging to the category *Fedeli d'amore*-type, as he makes use of a secret language that establishes a plurality of correspondences 'whose

²⁷Berger, 'Eliade's Double Approach...', *Religious...*, pp.9-12.

²⁸Eugen Simion, 'The Mythical Dignity of Narration', *Imagination and Meaning...* p.136.

²⁹*ibid.*, p.136.

³⁰*ibid.*, p.136.

function is the abolition of profane reality and the creation of a new and sacred state'³¹. In our opinion, one can discover in Eliade's literary writings what we shall call a *palimpsest-technique*, as the stratum of the profane interpretation incompletely covers the sacred level. We can also assert that he made use of 'intentional language' (or 'crepuscular language'), where important words have multiple meanings, as in the sacred mediaeval literature of certain sects (e.g. Sahajayana, Vajravana, Tantra).³²

Returning to the main theme of Eliade's fiction: the continuity of the sacred in an apparently de-sacralized world, we have to underline the fact that he not only points out the hidden myths or symbols with mythical charge, but, to use Matei Călinescu's expression, he 'remythologizes'³³ the world. In order to do that, the writer assembles a system of 1) hierophanies, 2) theophanies, 3) kratophanies and what I called 4) chronophanies (manifestations of sacred Time) and 5) diastimophanies (manifestation of the Sacred Space) which are intelligible only to the 'chosen' ones.

In the short story 'Stone Diviner' Eliade used a typical example (stone) to illustrate the presence of hierophanies. The main hero, Emanuel ('God's one') meets, on a beach, a former sailor (see the mythical significance of the 'sailor', e.g. Ulysses) who used to work as a guardian to the lighthouse (=Wisdom). The sailor, called Beldiman, is the great-grandson of Hagi Anton ('Hagi'=saint; Anton=Saint Anton), and has the power of divination with the help of stones. Beldiman not only predicts many events, but helps Emanuel to recollect happenings

³¹Berger, 'Eliade's Double Approach...', *Religious...*, pp.9-12.

³²For more information in 'intentional language' see Mircea Eliade's study in *Erotica mistica in Bengal* (Bucharest, Ed. 'Jurnalul literar', 1994), pp.121-34.

³³Matei Calinescu, ' "The Function of the Unreal": Reflections on Mircea Eliade's Short Fiction', *Imagination and Meaning...*, p.156.

from a former life. The stones are bearers of 'messages' about people's destinies. Nothing is random. The sacred lives next to us, but the forms through which it manifests itself are so common, ordinary, that it is no longer accessible, except to certain people (like Beldiman):

I understand from their shape, or according to certain edges, and the edges' direction, and the colours of the stone, because in one part the stone is darker, in others bright, coloured, striped. And then, I read the stones and I understand what will happen to the man who sat next to them, or, sometimes, directly upon them. Because, ... people never sit at random. Everybody sits as it was written.³⁴

(Înțeleg după forma lor, sau după anumite colțuri, și direcția colțurilor, și culorile pietrei, căci, într-o parte e mai întunecată, în altele e luminoasă, colorată, vărgată. Și atunci citesc în pietre și înțeleg ce-l așteaptă pe omul care s-a așezat lângă ele, sau, uneori, de-a dreptul pe ele. Pentru că, ... niciodată omul nu se așază la întâmplare. Fiecare se așază după cum îi e scris.)

This idea of certain stones' signification as 'fitting vehicles of the sacred' was amply developed by Eliade in his scholarly book Patterns in Comparative Religion, where he explains the *criteria* used in the 'worship of stones'. It is precisely because of a **specific shape**, because of their **size** or because they are **bound up with rituals** that some stones are venerated. In Eliade's vision there are two essential elements of the **hierophanies**: 1) a thing **becomes sacred in so far as it embodies something other than itself** and 2) a **hierophany implies a choice**, a separation of the thing manifesting the sacred from everything else around it.³⁵ The classical Eliadean examples of basic hierophanies are: the stone and the tree.

The tree as a **hierophany** or kratophany appears in nearly all of his literary writings (e.g. Maitreyi, 'Miss Christina', 'The Snake', 'Nights at

³⁴Eliade, 'Ghicitor in pietre', In Curte..., p.76.

³⁵Eliade, Patterns..., p. 13.

Serampore', 'Youth without Youth', The Forbidden Forest, 'With the Gypsy Girls'). If in **Maitreyi** a tree is worshipped, in 'The Snake' and 'With the Gypsy Girls', it represents another realm, with different essential rules. In 'Miss Christina' and 'Nights at Serampore' the wood concentrates kratophanies, the frightful power of the divine, while in 'Youth without Youth' we can clearly distinguish the theophanic (representation of God) function of the tree. Moreover we have to assert that there is no Eliadean writing where the binomial appearance of tree-wood does not imply a hierophany. Another essential basic hierophany, the sky, is present in Eliade's novel The Forbidden Forest.³⁶

It cannot be stressed enough that it is **the choice** of certain characters that transforms a familiar environment into 'something else'. But before tackling the 'choice'-dilemma, let us remark in passing (next to simple hierophanies like: stone, tree, sky) two examples of typical **kratophanies** and **theophanies** in Eliade's fiction. **Kratophanies** represent the sacred power which, sometimes, could become frightening. In the story 'Youth without Youth' the main character, Dominic Matei, is struck by lightning, a manifestation of power which triggers not only a process of regeneration of his entire being, but the development of a 'collective memory' through a process of universal *anamnesis*. A kratophany can also take 'monstruous' forms, in comparison with profane standards. Cucoaneş, the character from 'A Great Man' suffers a strange process of growth (he has a gland that disappeared from human development since the Pleistocene Age) which transforms him into a 'macro-anthropos', a degraded version of the first giants, the semi-divine beings who inhabited the earth. This exit from

³⁶The attaining of perfect Freedom is realised in the novel by a sort of 'unity of contraries'. There are two spatial levels: sky-wood; two essential dimensions: love-death; two sexes: Ştefan-Ileana; two halves of the year (St John's Night divides the year in two).

'normal' standards brings him distress (similar to Oana - the giant woman from 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'). He is expelled from society and only Nature can accommodate his new existential rhythms.

Two exemplary **theophanies** in Eliade's narrative could be encountered in stories like: 'A Fourteen-year-old Photo' and 'The Snake'. The first one is a literary form of Eliade's scientific idea of the 'unrecognizability of the sacred'. The main hero, Dr Martin, pretended to work miracles through the power of concentration. During one of his sessions, he not only cured a woman of asthma (simply by looking at her photo), but rejuvenated her to look as she did in that particular photo. In fact we have here a degraded version of the biblical stories about the healings performed by Christ. Like the Son of God, Dr Martin is punished by the incredulous, profane people. He is jailed and considered a charlatan. Released, he no longer attempts to make use of the 'belief'- theme. Only those accepting God and the power of His miracles (like Dumitru, the husband of the rejuvenated woman) could be cured. Eliade's message is clear: solely those 'open' to the existence of the sacred submerged in the profane could be redeemed. But not everyone can recognize miracles. As Dr Martin says:

Even as he is, Dumitru, with his naive, idolatrous and vain belief, is closer to the real God than all of us. And he will also be the first one to see Him, when the real God will show His face again, not in a church, nor in universities, but through revealing Himself unexpectedly, here, amongst us, maybe in a street, maybe in a bar, and we will not recognize Him and we will not bear witness for Him... ³⁷

(Aşa cum e Dumitru, cu credinţa lui naivă, idolatră şi vană, e mai aproape de Dumnezeu adevărat decât noi toţi. Şi tot el are să-l vada cel dintâi, când Dumnezeu adevărat îşi va arăta din nou faţa, nu în biserică, nici în universităţi, ci se va arăta pe neaşteptate, deodată, aici printre noi, poate pe stradă, poate într-un bar, dar noi nu-l vom recunoaşte şi nu vom mărturisi pentru El...)

³⁷ Eliade, 'O fotografie veche de 14 ani', În Curte..., p.72.

The novella 'The Snake' is also based on a theophany. Just as Dr Martin from 'A Fourteen-year-old Photo', assumed a double identity (he used to different names: Martin and Dugay), the main character from 'The Snake' has a double identity: a profane one (Andronic - the young sportsman and aviator) and a sacred one (as the King of Serpents). A disguised supernatural being, Andronic accomplishes an initiatory role for the group of people he meets on his way. He 'teaches' these 'profane' companions to immerse themselves in nature and imagination, in order to find the source of the redemptive power of the sacred. Serpents have their language, as do trees, birds, the 'always-in-love flowers' and Man should re-learn to communicate with nature as before, when he was in Paradise. Again the paradisaical motif is exploited in the final image of the island³⁸ where the two lovers meet and regain their Adamic innocence.

As a conclusion about the sacred's structure, it had to be said that the whole Eliadean literature bears a 'réseau' (network) of epiphanies. The examples are far too numerous to do justice to all of them. For this reason we only choose a few, to illustrate the three main categories: **hierophanies**, **theophanies** and **kratophanies**.

Another essential aspect of the sacred in the whole of Eliade's fiction is what Norman J. Girardot called 'the accidental nature of essence'. In some of his books this is expressed indirectly, while in others, it is direct. The short story 'Twelve Thousand Head of Cattle' is about a man who experiences an event from the past (the bombardment of an air-raid shelter) without realizing that he is no longer living in the present. Returning to his 'normal' time, he makes a bet with people in a pub that he is able to show them the house and shelter that others

³⁸The island represents here a neutral territory between: land-Dorina-feminine principle and water-Andronic-male principle.

claimed had disappeared some weeks before. He is puzzled to find out that he was wrong. As 'the essence' has an accidental nature, those experiencing the sacred are left with the choice of either 1) learning a lesson or 2) ignoring or dismissing the happening. Iancu Gore, the character from the story, adopts the second variant, choosing disbelief, but, as the ending suggests, he is irretrievably caught in between a sacred dimension and a profane one. The 'others' cannot see what he witnesses and this is an aspect we will tackle further, in connection with the concept of 'educated imagination'.

Returning to the fleeting character of the sacred (= the 'real', the essence) we have to emphasize that this aspect was also expressed in the Eliadean oeuvre by the metaphor of the encounter with a magic Woman. She bears all the signs of transcendence and reveals the secrets of another realm to the hero. This image of the magic Woman appeared first in the novella 'Miss Christina' and in the novel Marriage in Heaven, finding its sublimated versions in two late novels: The Forbidden Forest and Nineteen Roses. In the first two writings, the heroine shares with the male protagonist such a profound and destructive love that it surpasses the boundaries of normality and enters the realm of complete ecstasy, freedom, madness. Egor, the main character of 'Miss Christina', while loving the young girl Sanda on a profane level, becomes attracted by the unbound seductive powers of Miss Christina, a vampire who presents herself with the ambivalence and femininity of a symbol of the Anima. During her fleeting appearances, Christina makes Egor cross his existential, ordinary boundaries and offers him inimitable experiences (e.g. meeting the Devil's principle inside himself, understanding the ephemeral nature of all profane things and degrees of voluptuousness he never experienced with the placid Sanda). It is Christina, and not Sanda (Egor's innocent fiancée), who triggers a surge of the most hidden layers

of the hero's subconscious, where the sacred, old beliefs and superstitions persist. He 'kills' (in a ritualistic way) the vampire, in the name of a profane ideal, but while destroying Christina, he realizes that in fact, he 'kills' his own being. The text could also be interpreted as an allegory of the contemporary man who, while destroying the sacred, destroys his inner Self, where the best part of him lays: any potential, superhuman freedom, any madness and any godliness.

In the novel Marriage in Heaven, Ileana - the magic Woman - is endowed with an astral power of seduction. After nearly driving Hasnas mad, she leaves Mavrodin with the memories of an union outside any normal *criteria*. An 'educated reading' reveals the ecstatic Tantra experiences, where the state of androgyny is accomplished. As in any initiation the protagonist experiences both a 'death' and a 'revival':

In the beginning I had the revelation of wedding and death in a frighteningly concrete way, because we both used to remain unconscious, for a long time, united even when our bodies were inertly lying, broken by a beatitude which was no longer theirs and which we could not keep except in a supreme exhaustion, in death...³⁹

(La început revelația nunții și a morții am avut-o înspăimântător de concret, căci rămâneam amândoi fără simțire, vreme îndelungată, uniți chiar atunci când trupurile noastre zăceau inerte, fărâmate de o beatitudine care nu mai era a lor și pe care nu o puteam păstra decât într-o istovire supremă, în moarte...)

In 'Miss Christina' and Marriage in Heaven, **love** and **death** become one, with an accent on the initiatory function of the former, while in The Forbidden Forest and Nineteen Roses, the same formula applies with the distinction that love becomes sublimated, more spiritual, and the emphasis is put upon the initiatory function of death. In The Forbidden Forest, Ileana is 'bearer of sacred' and the hero, Ștefan, after

³⁹Eliade, Nunta in Cer in Maitreyi..., p.213.

many wanderings, understands that his destiny is irretrievably linked to hers. Ileana's surname (revealed only towards the book's ending) Sideri, suggests the Latin 'sidus-eris', meaning 'star', 'heavenly body'. She is the woman-fairy who bewitches the protagonist, Stefan, with transcendent powers. The hero meets her during Midsummer Night, while strolling alone in a wood near Bucharest. In Romanian folklore⁴⁰ a man is forbidden to wander in the forest during Midsummer Night, as the sight of the fairies could provoke madness. That is precisely what happens to Stefan: he becomes mad, but his 'madness'/love has a transcendent value. Realizing the truth, he confesses to Ileana:

I am in love with you and sometimes I feel this love does not let me live. I walk like a crazy man, I speak to myself... But this love could reveal something to me. Maybe I met you and I fell for you in order to be taught something. Teach me, then !⁴¹

(Sunt îndrăgostit de d-ta și uneori simt cum iubirea aceasta nu mă lasă să trăiesc. Umblu ca un năuc, vorbesc singur... Dar iubirea aceasta ar putea să-mi revele ceva. Poate te-am întâlnit și m-am îndrăgostit de d-ta ca să mă înveți ceva. Învață-mă atunci !)

Ultimately, Ileana is a fairy, a star, and Death itself who takes the form of a supreme initiation.

The similar lightning-bolt apparition of 'Eurydice' in Nineteen Roses has an initiatory value. She reveals the realm of the dead to Pandeale, through love. But death means here an exit from time, means freedom. Yet because the sacred is frightening, the hero Pandeale suffers an attack of amnesia. Another woman 'cures' him with the aid and power of art.

In Eliadean fiction not only objects or happenings could become epiphanies, but people as well are bearers of myths and epiphanic 'signs'.

⁴⁰See also our chapter treating the Midsummer Night symbolism.

⁴¹Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. I, (1991) p.60.

And in order to understand and be able to recognize the camouflaged forms of the Sacred, an 'educated imagination' (a term pertaining to Norman J. Girardot) is needed. At a primary level, Eliade's fiction opens itself to two basic interpretations, both of which are valid: a sacred and a profane one. The reader has the choice: he can prefer either view, according to his own degree of acceptance of the sacred. This is the case with numerous writings like: 'The Snake', 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats', 'With the Gypsy Girls', 'A General's Uniforms', 'Dayan', 'Stone Diviner', 'Youth without Youth' and Nineteen Roses. What allows this double interpretation is precisely the fleeting and incomplete character of the sacred's revelations.

One of Eliade's pillars, on which he bases his theory of the sacred - profane is his interpretation of **Time**. According to his theory, the religious man experiences a Time qualitatively different from that of the profane man:

For the religious man, Time is neither homogeneous, nor continuous. There are intervals of sacred Time, for example the feasts' time.. and, on the other hand, there is the profane Time, the usual temporal duration, in which acts without religious significance are inscribed.⁴²

(Timpul nu este nici omogen și nici continuu pentru omul religios. Există intervale de Timp sacru, ca de pildă timpul sărbătorilor... și, pe de altă parte, Timpul profan, durata temporală obișnuită, în care se înscriu actele lipsite de semnificație religioasă.)

But while he asserted that Time is neither homogeneous, nor continuous for the religious man, we notice that the same is true for the profane man. The main difference would be, in our opinion, that for a religious man, sacred Time and not the quotidian temporal duration, is all important and 'real', while for a secular man, it is profane time which

⁴²Eliade, Sacru..., p.61.

counts. We could say that the first category considers profane time non-significant, while the second one dismisses sacred Time as 'non-real', or unusual. The distinctions lie, in fact, in two different perceptions of 'reality'.

According to Eliade⁴³ a mythical event has the qualitative function of the eternal present and consequently determines the profane duration of historical events. Several studies were written on this theory about mythical Time; about its 'irreversible' flow, its Parmenidian quality (always equal to itself). What should be noted here is another Eliadean observation that 'religious participation in a feast implies the exit from the "usual" temporal duration and the reintegration into the mythical Time made actual by that feast' ('Participarea religioasă la o sărbătoare implică ieșirea din durata temporală "obișnuită" și reintegrarea în Timpul mitic actualizat de acea sărbătoare.')⁴⁴.

The arts represented for Eliade the ideal way to escape the alienation of historical time. In his youth he was a fine player of the piano and during his entire life he wrote art-criticism. But of all the arts, literature is closest to myth, being a 'degraded' version of the *recitatio* of myths in religious rituals. In Eliade's opinion, fiction confronts the reader with an imaginary time and with different rhythms:

More strongly than in any of the other arts, in literature we feel a revolt against historical time, the desire to attain to other temporal rhythms than that in which we are condemned to live and work.⁴⁵

Following his scientific ideas, Eliade incorporated in his literary work different dimensions of time, developing a real skill in 'encrypting' the

⁴³ibid., p.78.

⁴⁴ibid., p.61.

⁴⁵Eliade, Myth..., p.193.

sacred, mythical Time into the profane duration of his characters' lives. Matei Calinescu highlighted the fact that the quality of Eliade's fiction resides in the 'growing awareness that the world of *primordial time* and the world of *linear time* can and do express themselves through a strikingly similar language.'⁴⁶ Consequently, he continues, the problem is not one of causation, but one of recognition. While acknowledging the similarity of expression of the two types of time (which could be identical from a profane perspective and totally different from a sacred one), we have to admit that the issue is far more complex. For example, Eliade himself confessed⁴⁷ about his novel The Forbidden Forest that although the novel is a fresco of the Romanian society its centre of gravity lies in the different conceptions of time assumed by the characters. The narrative has its temporal rhythms and in the beginning, Eliade utilised⁴⁸ '**fantastic time**' (the meeting in the forest), to skip towards '**psychological time**' and further, to slide into '**historical time**'. The ending of the novel is faithful to Eliade's concept of mythical Time's cyclicity. The end re-projects Stefan (the main character) into 'the fantastic time' of childhood, which was more like a presentiment at the beginning of The Forbidden Forest.

In the Eliadean literary works, at least five types of what we called **chronophanies** are employed. First is **(I) the irruption of sacred time into the profane duration**. This phenomenon is perceived by only a few characters, who re-live a certain moment from the past, while being certain that they are still in the present. The stories: 'Nights at Serampore' and 'Twelve Thousand Head of Cattle' are paradigmatic for this first category of chronophanies. In the first story, the three main

⁴⁶Calinescu, ' "The Function of the Unreal"...', Imagination and Meaning..., p.150.

⁴⁷Eliade, Jurnal..., vol. I, p.193.

⁴⁸ibid., p.193.

characters are projected one hundred and fifty years back, while they are driven in a car through Serampore forest. Stopped in the middle of the forest, they reach the house of Nilamvara Dasa, an aristocrat who lived in XVIIIth century. After this episode the three characters learn that they had entered another dimension of time, as a consequence occult powers unleashed by Suren Bose, a Tantric yogi. One of the heroes tries to explain to Swami Shivananda:

I think that somebody endowed with powerful occult powers can withdraw you from the present, annul your actual condition and project you anywhere in the universe.⁴⁹

(Cred că cineva înzestrat cu puternice virtuți oculte te poate scoate din prezent, îți poate anula condiția ta actuală și te poate proiecta oriunde în univers.)

The conclusion is obvious: in a world of appearances, no event is consistent, no historical happening is 'real'. Consequently a play of appearances could be created with the same material, and history could be changed.

In 'Twelve Thousand Head of Cattle' the merchant Iancu Gore is caught in *an event*[†] that happened forty days earlier. In an air-raid shelter he listens to other persons' conversation without knowing that all those people died and the shelter was destroyed in a bombardment which had really happened previously. Iancu Gore is a typically profane man, obsessed with the 'normal' dimensions of time (he checks his gold watch all the time, and his name in Romanian contains the words: 'year' and 'hours' - Iancu; Gore). Even after having proof that he experienced an event he continues to be incredulous. Through this character Mircea

⁴⁹Eliade, 'Nopti la Serampore', Secretul..., vol. II, p.88.

Eliade expresses the modern views of the desacralized man, ruled by the clock.

A second category of **chronophanies** consists of a perfect **(II) intertwining of profane time with mythical time**, (in its pure acceptance). Two novellas are relevant here: 'The Snake' and 'The Old man and the Bureaucrats'. The mythical Time of the beginnings is merged into profane time. The text is doubled and thus the reading becomes dual: profane/sacred. As Eugen Simion wrote, 'in an ordinary history there exists a "myth-history", and in the themes running through... a multitude of "mythemes" are concealed'⁵⁰. This is especially the case with 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats' where all the stories of the labyrinthic 'confession' made by the teacher Farama are 'myth-histories' broken in fragments and then amalgamated. Following the entire 'myth-history' means 'initiation' and, as in any other initiation, the reader has to undergo certain trials in order to acquire the 'code'. This is one of the reasons for the stories' fragmentation. Another one lies in the flash-like character of the sacred itself, which penetrates the profane and disappears in order to reappear again where it is least expected.

A third class of **chronophanies** appears in those writings where, alienated by the 'terror of History', **(III) the characters search for an exit from Time**. As people are condemned to live in History, in a predetermined dimension of Time, as in a jail, leaving time becomes equivalent with acquiring real Freedom. This is the main theme of: The Forbidden Forest, Nineteen Roses, 'Dayan', 'In the Shadow of a Lily'. Valentin Iconaru, a character from 'In the Shadow of a Lily', pointed out that 'the whole world lives in exile, but only a few people know that...'.⁵¹

⁵⁰Simion, 'The Mythical Dignity...', Imagination and Meaning..., P.137.

⁵¹Eliade, La Umbra..., vol. V, p.198.

Stefan, the hero from The Forbidden Forest expresses his nostalgia for 'an existence without breaches':

Maybe I had, like others, a nostalgia for an existence without breaches. Only a saint could live in time and concomitantly outside time, in eternity. Only such an existence, plenary, round...⁵²

(Poate că aveam și eu, ca toți, nostalgia unei existențe fără rupturi. Numai un sfânt poate trăi în timp și totodată în afara timpului, în eternitate. Numai o asemenea existență plinară, rotundă...)

The fourth grouping of **chronophanies** represent **(IV) an irruption of the sacred into the profane, triggered by the approach of a character's death**. The heroes pass from the profane into the sacred, from life into death, from an initiatc historical labyrinth into a religious one. This intermediary state between two ways of being was depicted in writings like: 'With the Gypsy Girls', 'At Dionysus' Court', 'Ivan', 'A General's Uniforms'.

Finally, the fifth category of **chronophanies** is represented by certain **(V) experiments with Time**. These experiments are made through yoga practices ('The Secret of Dr Honigberger'), medical knowledge ('Les trois grâces'), miracles ('A Fourteen-year-old Photo') or 'accidents' ('Youth without Youth'). In the short story 'Dayan', the Wandering Jew teaches the protagonist the main characteristic of time, that is, flexibility:

Let Time gather between us. If you really have mathematical genius, as I hear, you will also understand this property of Time to concentrate and expand according to circumstances.⁵³

⁵²Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. II (1991), pp.404-05.

⁵³Eliade, 'Dayan', La Umbra..., vol. V, p.136.

(Lasă să se adune Timpul între noi. Dacă ai într-adevar geniu matematic, așa cum se spune, ai să înțelegi și această virtute a Timpului de a se concentra și dilata după împrejurări.)

An important point about Eliade's way of manoeuvring Time in his fiction was put forward by Adriana Berger who noticed that Eliade's entire literary work is organized around four holy events: St John's Day, Christmas, New Year and Easter. She stressed that 'it is not only a sacred Christian time which develops around the cycle of creation, revelation and redemption; it is also a festive time, a *tempus festorum*, reenacted by the movement of the sun and the moon...' ⁵⁴.

Apart from the different dimensions of Time, Eliade employed in his fiction what we might term **diastimophanies** (from Greek: 'διάστημα' = 'space'), that is different qualities of Space. His heroes move out of profane space, in a search for the Centre through a labyrinth full of 'signs'. Once the Centre is attained, the character can leave Time and unite with transcendence. Among the writings centered on the idea of 'the religious experience of non-homogeneous space' ⁵⁵ and the search for the Centre, the most representative are the novels The Forbidden Forest, Nineteen Roses and the short story 'In the Shadow of a Lily'. If, in the short story, the Centre is a highway, near a forest, in both novels the Centre is in a forest. We will not dwell on the significance of the forest/wood, we only note the symbolism of the tree as cosmic image and *axis mundi* uniting the three levels: underworld - earth - heaven.

⁵⁴Berger, 'Eliade's Double Approach...', Religious..., pp.9-12.

⁵⁵Eliade, Sacral..., p.21.

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FORGETFULNESS

If time and space are all-important for the analysis of Eliade's dialectic sacred/profane, so is the element of forgetfulness, which he employs with different meanings in the narrative. Usually 'forgetfulness' is synonymous with 'profane', while 'anamnesis' triggers a recollection of the sacred.

In his last novel, Nineteen Roses, Eliade builds up his plot on a central episode from the Indian mythological folklore: the amnesia of Matsyendranath. This epic nucleus was segmented by Eliade⁵⁶ into several elements: 1) a spiritual Master falls in love with a queen; 2) there is physical love that immediately provokes the state of amnesia in the Master; 3) he is sought out by a dancing girl (=his disciple) and, through a series of symbols (dance movements, secret signs, mysterious language), is helped to recover his memory, that is, consciousness of his identity; 4) the Master's 'forgetfulness' is assimilated with death, and his 'awakening' or *anamnesis* is a prerequisite for immortality. For those who have a knowledge of this mythical fragment, the novel Nineteen Roses is already decoded. Niculina, the heroine, is nobody else but 'a disguised' disciple, an 'initiate' who tries (through dancing and rituals) to provoke the process of *anamnesis* in Master Pandele's memory. Following the mythical pattern, this one 'forgot' his true vocation as a consequence to an encounter with a woman nicknamed 'Eurydice' (with whom he has experienced physical love). In the end, after Pandele's *awakening* from his profane status, he disappears in a sledge (a synonym for freedom and immortality). The same paradigm underlines the novella 'At Dionysus' Court', where the hero, Adrian, is amnesiac and Leana

⁵⁶Eliade, Myth..., p.115.

helps him to remember his true identity (he is Orpheus) and enter the realm of death which signifies immortality.

The Forbidden Forest is structured around the same ideas. Stefan, the main character, is aware that he forgets the 'essential', that is the fleeting instances of the sacred, that punctuate his life. The search for Ileana is in fact a process of *anamnesis* which lasts twelve years (or a single mythical year, or day). In the labyrinth of profane life, he often forgets his real centre (symbolized by Ileana), but 'signs' from the sacred world guide him towards a final encounter with her - a prelude to an eternal existential dimension.

Dayan, from the novella with the same name, is guided through a process of remembering 'essential' things, by the Wandering Jew. They both start a journey in Time, where profane memory is dismissed. The Wandering Jew advises Dayan:

'Make an effort and forget the rest', the old man urged him. 'Remember the essential only. Of what you sometime understood as being essential.'⁵⁷

('Fă un efort și uită restul', îl îndemnă bătrânul. 'Adu-ți aminte doar esențialul. De ce-ai înțelege cândva că este esențialul.')

Other heroes like Farama ('The Old Man and the Bureaucrats') or Gavrilesco ('With the Gypsy Girls') also lose this memory of banal happenings, remembering only those events with a mythical kernel. Eliade uses 'forgetfulness' as a tool, to break up the continuous manifestation of the sacred into sequences, in the characters' consciousness. 'Forgetfulness' became equivalent to 'blindness'. It is the paradoxical status of 'forgetfulness' that enhances the labyrinthine quality of Eliade's literary writings. To conclude, we can assert that the

⁵⁷Eliade, 'Dayan', La Umbra..., vol. V, p.147.

fiction of the author Eliade is constructed according to the rules set up by Eliade the scholar: a world where the sacred sends its sparks through the alienating network of the profane.

A SPIRITUAL GUIDE: NAE IONESCU

Mottos: ... God needs man's free act of love, in order that everything may return to Him. So that the tragedy of man, from whom God turned His face, corresponds to the even more frightening of God, from whom man turned his face.

tragedy

(Nae Ionescu, 'Tristia', Roza Vânturilor, pp.419-20)

The weakness of our faith makes us powerless; the lack of belief paralyses us, and lack of belief is the sin. So, we sin, all of us, because we do not trust that we could intervene in Creation. And refusing to intervene in Creation, we let God alone.

(Mircea Eliade, in Alexandru Mircea, 'Un Doliu Românesc fără Mângâiere', Limite Nr 48-49, Nov. 1986, Paris, pp.29-31)

As MacLinscott Ricketts wrote, '... the professor of philosophy who impressed Eliade most from the start, and the one who was to have the greatest influence on the shaping of Eliade's thought was Nae Ionescu'¹. As the impact that Nae Ionescu had upon Eliade's future theories was not tackled extensively², it is precisely this aspect that forms the subject of this chapter. In his biography on Eliade, MacLinscott Ricketts made an erudite presentation of Nae Ionescu's personality and work. Keeping this in mind, we will only dwell on those aspects that are directly linked to Eliade's oeuvre, both scientific and literary.

¹Ricketts, Mircea Eliade..., vol. I, p.91.

²To the best of my knowledge only Ricketts has drawn parallels between the two, as we will show later.

Reading Eliade's writings, it is impossible not to think of Ionescu. It also became a truism in Romanian culture to affirm that this philosopher-journalist-mystic had a controversial, highly paradoxical personality. His interests were widespread: philosophy, mathematics, languages (including ancient Greek and Latin), history, economy, politics, religions, arts, 'modern' trends (feminism, psychoanalysis, new sects). Nae Ionescu was considered ^{by Papanace} not only 'the Romanian intellectual of the noblest race' ('cel mai de rasă intelectual român')³, but, according to those who knew him, he was a Teacher *par excellence*, both charismatic and sophisticated. Eliade himself, who was his closest disciple and collaborator, wrote about his 'Socratic technique' of teaching and about the influence he exerted on the generation of intellectuals formed during 1922-1930. Those studying that period in Romania's history can clearly perceive that Nae Ionescu, like Nicolae Iorga, was one of the brains who not only formed high calibre intellectuals, by helping them to choose their own paths, but was behind the political scene of the time.

Editing some of Ionescu's articles, Eliade referred to this aspect of his mentor's activity:

Rarely has an epoch borrowed more willingly, and so naturally, the ideas, suggestions, formulas and slogans of a single man, who did not even take the trouble to call them to account.⁴

(Rareori o epocă a împrumutat cu mai multă bucurie, și mai firesc, idei, sugestii, formule și lozinci - dela un singur om, care măcar nici nu s-a ostenit să țină socoteală de ele.)

³Constantin Papanace, in Nae Ionescu, Fenomenul Legionar (Bucharest, Ed. Antet XX Press, 1993), p.61.

⁴Mircea Eliade, '... Și un Cuvânt al Editorului' in Nae Ionescu, Roza Vânturilor (Bucharest, Ed. Roza Vânturilor, 1990), p.422.

The originality of Ionescu was also acknowledged in an interview given by Petre Tutea, a famous Romanian philosopher: 'Nae Ionescu could be compared to nobody in his time. He was himself.' ('Nae Ionescu nu se măsoara în vremea lui cu nimeni. Era el însuși.')⁵. As lecturer in Logic and Metaphysics, as a journalist and a promoter of religion, Ionescu acted as a 'lighthouse' for society. In the University's *aula*, he challenged his students 'to think for themselves' and not take other philosophers' ideas for granted; in the newspaper he edited (Cuvântul), he 'penalised' governmental decisions, making public not only their mechanisms, but the politicians' mistakes too; and finally, as a religious man, he discovered in Orthodoxy the very essence of the Romanian soul. Breaking norms, challenging thinking, his original observations re-shaped, at the time, the Romanian elite's mentality. We will analyse further some of Ionescu's precepts that, after a process of sublimation, crystallized into major Eliadean concepts.

⁵Petre Tutea, Între Dumnezeu și Neamul Meu (Bucharest, Fundația Anastasia - Ed. Arta Grafică, 1992), p.305.

I. SCIENTIFIC IDEAS AND LITERARY PATHS

'THE TERROR OF HISTORY'

While a prisoner with Mircea Eliade at Miercurea-Ciuc, in a political camp, Nae Ionescu held conferences on different subjects ^{in May, 1938.} In the fourth of these lectures, entitled 'The Nation', he underlined the relativity of History:

History is a necessary reality, but also a changing one, because the facts that form it change. This means that everything that happens in history, that is in time and space, is relative. Consequently events are relative as well, in the sense that they do not represent a meaning in themselves, they are not produced according to a certain law.⁶

(Istoria este o realitate necesară, dar și schimbătoare, deoarece și faptele care o constituie se schimbă. Asta înseamnă că tot ce se întâmplă în istorie, adică în timp și spațiu, este relativ. Atunci și întâmplările sunt relative, în înțelesul că nu reprezintă un sens în sine, nu se produc după o lege anumită.)

Ionescu's stress on the idea that happenings change in relation to Time could have triggered Eliade's first thoughts on what he came to call 'the terror of History'. But while Eliade's teacher saw in any historical moment a fragment of time that people are obliged to assume, because they are 'linked' to it (*'Every historical moment has its form of life, and people are linked to it... Every historical moment represents a historical formula, compulsory for those who participate in it'*)⁷, the historian of

⁶Ionescu, 'Natiunea' Fenomenul..., p.32.

⁷[*'Fiecare moment istoric își are forma lui de viață, iar oamenii sunt legați de ea.'*] Fiecare moment istoric reprezintă o formulă istorică, obligatorie pentru oamenii care participă la ea'. Ionescu, 'România Legionară nu este un Fapt Simplu, ci Complex', Fenomenul..., pp.33-34. Author's *italics*.

religions sees this position of Man inside History as a curse. the fragment of Time in which people are condemned to live, becomes for Eliade a symbol of incarceration, and ultimately real freedom turns out to be equivalent to leaving Time through religion, love or death. For Eliade, abolition of History also meant the establishment of the *illud tempus*, the mythical Time of the Beginnings:

The capacity of man to be free and a creator through belief, had it been used, could have led to the 'abolition' of history and to the establishing of 'that time' prophesized by Isaiah.⁸

(Capacitatea omului de a fi liber și creator prin credință, dacă ar fi folosită, ar duce la... 'abolirea' istoriei și la instaurarea 'timpului aceluia' prorocit de Isaia.)

Nevertheless the idea that history is relative, that people are closed in their fragment of Time is common to both mentor and disciple.

THE 'DEGRADATION' OF THE SACRED AND ITS CAMOUFLAGE IN THE PROFANE

The 'degradation' of the sacred and its camouflage in the profane are two pivotal Eliadean concepts, which we discussed earlier, in a special chapter ('The Hermeneutic Sacred /Profane'). In this respect, two of Nae Ionescu's articles might have played a role in the development of Eliade's notions.

⁸Mircea Eliade, in Alexandru Mircea, 'Un Doliu Românesc fără Mângâiere', *Limite*, Nr 48-49, Paris, Nov. 1986, p.30.

In 'The Easter of Thinking and Other Types of Easter', Nae Ionescu proceeds to the 'operation' of de-sacralization of the sacred, a process that Eliade will undertake later, but in reverse. Ionescu tries to concentrate on relating the meaning of the Easter feast to its profane co-ordinates, in order to explain the complexity of religious feeling, as a part of a 'spiritual landscape':

What is Christ ? A hero of a moral conviction. What is Easter ? The celebration of the remembrance of a juridical process between two sorts of ethics, in which, over the centuries, the victim's ethics was victorious.⁹

(Ce e Christos ? Un erou al unei convingeri morale. Ce e Paștele ? Prăznuirea amintirii unui proces juridic între două morale, în care peste veacuri a învins cea a victimei.)

While Nae Ionescu attempted to show the essential function of the transcendent feeling that enveloped common happenings, Eliade developed the idea and discovered the dialectic sacred / profane and the new perspective this brings. Through an inverted procedure, Eliade detected the ineffable inside common occurrences of life, and consequently discovered that the sacred resides within the profane, while Nae Ionescu revealed the structure of the profane within the sacred. Whichever the path, they both reached the same Christological conclusion: 'miracles are within anybody's reach; you have only to understand yourself, and ask from yourself' ('minunile sunt la îndemâna oricui; numai să stii a te înțelege, și a cere de la tine')¹⁰.

In a new departure, Eliade writes about 'seeing', about the ability to 'perceive' the hidden sacred of the 'profane' world, as a road towards one's Self, while Ionescu employs more the idea of sacralization of the

⁹Ionescu, Op. cit., Roza..., p.70.

¹⁰Ionescu, 'Juxta Crucem', Roza..., p.402.

profane, through one's Self. But the main way to reach the Self, through pain and love, is common to both thinkers. Eliade applied these concepts in his literary writings as well, particularly in the novels: The Forbidden Forest, Nineteen Roses and the novella 'Dayan'. The heroes undergo journeys towards themselves and finally attain their Real Centre.

The mystical paths are various and Nae Ionescu, borrowing from Evelyn Underhill¹¹, talked to his students about three important ways to cognition: 1) the **pilgrimage** path; 2) the **ascetic saintly** path and 3) the **divine marriage** path. In his fiction, Eliade was to utilize this theory, and some of his writings could be strictly framed in each of these three categories, while others make use of more than one way of cognition. The **pilgrimage path** is present in the novels: Maitreyi, The Forbidden Forest, Isabel and the Devil's Waters; and in stories like: 'Youth without Youth', 'The Old Man and the Bureaucrats'. The heroes of these writings are 'pilgrims', they have to travel long distances, in order to reach Understanding and become 'initiated' in the mysteries of life. For the second category, represented by the symbolical figure of the '**saint**', four of Eliade's characters are typical: Cesare from the Light Dying Away, David Dragu from The Return from Paradise, Irina from The Forbidden Forest and 'Dayan' from the novella with the same name. All these characters seek enlightenment through asceticism and an austere life that exceeds the limit of their biology. The third category, represented by the image of the '**bridegroom**' who attains illumination through **love and divine marriage**, appears in Marriage in Heaven, The Forbidden Forest, Nineteen Roses, 'The Snake' and 'Dayan'. From all these ways of illumination, Nae Ionescu favoured the idea of 'love as an instrument of cognition', as opposed to love as an

¹¹See Ricketts, Mircea Eliade..., vol. I, p.108.

'instrument of creation' and of love as an ethical ideal. Love is the process of somebody uniting with the object of his love, so the identification of the subject with the object is the best way to attain knowledge since 'you do not see that which is; you see that which you are'.¹²

The American researcher MacLinscott Ricketts was the first to remark¹³ that Eliade's ideas concerning love should be understood through Nae Ionescu's philosophy.

THE THEORY OF THE CENTRE; THE LABYRINTH AND ULYSSES

The **theory of the Centre** in Eliade's scientific works highlights the Centre's characteristic of 'belonging' to a certain culture, tribe etc. It is a particular Centre, chosen by a particular community, to represent the focal point of their religious life. The Centre can be anywhere, as long as it is sanctified by the beliefs of a group of people. Every culture had its metaphysical guidance relating to a particular Centre (a mountain, a pole, a temple). In man's need for a spiritual *orientatio* resides the concept of a multiplicity or a infinity of Centres. As Eliade showed in his studies, a nomadic tribe leaving a place has to consecrate a new Centre in the new location, in order to establish their spiritual 'belonging' to that place, and in a symbolic reverse way, to make the territory 'theirs'.

¹²Nae Ionescu in Ricketts, Mircea Eliade..., vol. I, p.108.

¹³Ricketts, Mircea Eliade..., vol. I, p.109.

This idea could be found *in nuce* in one of Nae Ionescu's lectures, called 'The Nation':

If a nation realizes God on earth, I am not interested except in the God I myself live, and not the one experienced by the Hungarians, the French etc.: in Naples nearly every street has its Madonna, something belonging to the street; this shows the necessity of localization, of individualization, nationalization of God.¹⁴

(Dacă nația realizează pe Dumnezeu pe pământ, pe mine nu mă interesează decât Dumnezeul pe care-l trăiesc eu și nu ungurii, francezii, etc.: în Napoli aproape fiecare stradă are Madona ei, ceva al străzii; aceasta înseamnă necesitatea localizării, individualizării, naționalizării lui Dumnezeu.)

Also Nae Ionescu stressed the fact that in history there are specific periods in which man is closer to God. Similarly, the 'quality' of certain places may be more endowed with sacred powers than others.¹⁵

This observation could have been a starting point for Eliade's philosophy of the non-homogeneity of space and time (there is a 'real'/sacred territory and a 'non-real' / profane one, as well as a time with the same co-ordinates). Eliade introduced this schema in many of his literary works, the most representative being 'A Fourteen-Year-Old Photo' and The Forbidden Forest. The historian of religions has also written about the difficulty of reaching the Centre, as a characteristic of initiation:

The way that leads to the centre is 'a difficult journey'... and this is true at all levels of the real:... the pilgrimage to saintly places; heroic expeditions fraught with dangers...; the difficulties of him who searches the way towards himself, towards the 'centre' of his being, etc.¹⁶

¹⁴Ionescu, Fenomenul..., p.55.

¹⁵...there are in history periods in which the human soul is closer to God (as again there are places on earth, where... God particularly shows Himself)...'. Ionescu, 'Sufletul Mistic', Roza..., pp.22-23.

¹⁶Eliade, Mitul eternei reîntoarceri in Eseuri..., p.23. The underlining is mine.

(Drumul care duce spre centru este 'un drum dificil'... și aceasta se verifică la toate nivelurile realului:... pelerinajul la locurile sfinte...; peregrinările pline de pericol ale expedițiilor eroice...; rățăcirile prin labirint; dificultățile celui care caută drumul către sine, către 'centrul' ființei sale etc.)

This belief that difficulty and pain could become joy, if they are understood as an initiatic necessity, was one of the views that stood at the core of Nae Ionescu's system of thought. And it was to be one of Eliade's lifelong *credos* too. Eliade applies it in his commentaries to the Romanian ballad *Miorita*. The approaching death of the hero, envisaged as a Cosmic Wedding, is seen by the historian of religions, as a perfect valorization of mystical jubilation at communion with God. In other scientific studies too, Eliade wrote about sacrifice/pain and their last threshold, death, as a supreme initiation.

In the article 'Juxta Crucem', Ionescu wrote¹⁷: 'From the crucifixion onwards, people know that neither pain, nor joy as such, are decisive for our holiness or happiness; but the attitude which our spiritual personality adopts in front of them.' ('De la răstignire, lumea știe că nu durerea sau bucuria ca atare sunt hotărâtoare pentru suferința sau fericirea noastră; ci atitudinea pe care personalitatea noastră spirituală o păstrează în fața lor.'). Nae Ionescu held this position from a strictly Christian point of view¹⁸, while Eliade raised it to the rank of a paradigmatic attitude for all instances of life/labyrinth. This is one of the reasons why this theory appears camouflaged in the majority of Eliade's literary writings. In the masterpiece The Forbidden Forest, one of the characters, called Biris, while tortured to reveal political secrets, adopts the Romanian shepherd's attitude, from the ballad *Miorița*¹⁹, and accepts

¹⁷Ionescu, Op.cit., Roza..., p.401.

¹⁸'Christianity accepts pain as a reality, it does not deny, but ENDOWS IT WITH VALUE... So that pain itself can become a source of endless joy, if it fulfils a function and receives a meaning in our effort towards salvation.' *ibid.*, p.401.

¹⁹We analysed this episode in the chapter dedicated to the ballad.

the pain he is going through as a threshold before the ecstasy and supreme knowledge of death.

Even in his autobiographical writings, Eliade wrote about the sufferings of his personal life as an initiatic trial towards his own Centre. In his discussions with Claude Henri-Rocquet, Eliade did not randomly choose Ulysses as his emblematic figure. In his Autobiography the scholar notes a phrase from Ortega (Ideas y creencias), which reminded him of his student years and of his mentor: 'No creo que haya imagen más adecuada de la vida que ésta del naufragio'. He commented:

... the same image obsessed Nae Ionescu in the last years of his life and in his last lectures. And not in the sense of a catastrophic event, but as a generally human condition: man is, from the beginning, a fallen being; he fights to stay alive, to last and, especially, to save himself spiritually.²⁰

(...aceeași imagine obseda pe Nae Ionescu în ultimii săi ani și în ultimele sale cursuri. Și nu în sensul de eveniment catastrofic, ci de condiție general umană: omul e, de la început, o făptură căzută; luptă ca să se mențină în viață, să dureze și, mai ales, să se salveze spiritual.)

NAE IONESCU'S ELITISM AND ELIADE'S THEORY OF CREATIVE ELITES

In one of his famous articles, 'Culture and Democracy', Nae Ionescu raises the problem of an incompatibility between real culture (created by elites) and democracy, which supposes an education of the masses, a pseudo-culture. Ionescu²¹ envisages learning as a process of personal sublimation and 'deepening', that is a process of differentiation, of

²⁰Eliade, Jurnal..., vol. I, p.25.

²¹Ionescu, Op. cit., Roza..., p.370.

singularization. Consequently, educated people cannot accept the authority and rule of the masses, of a democracy:

Do you imagine a cultured man, endlessly hunted by problems, always inventive and searching, consenting to join the ranks and obey the decision - according to the numerical criterion of the majority ?²²

(Vă închipuiți dvs un om cult, vecinic frământat de probleme, vecinic inventiv și iscoditor, consimțind să intre în rânduri și să se supună hotărârii - după criterii numerice - a majorității (sic) ?)

The subject is part of a larger framework of the European thought at the time, influenced by the elitist views of the two Italian sociologists: Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto. Although in other writings Ionescu makes an apology for the collectivity and affirms that 'no developed man could praise the personality as an ideal', as 'all the real powers of life are supra-individual' and only they give sense and direction to events²³, the article 'Culture and Democracy' stresses the aristocratic essence of knowledge.

From this elitism, promoted by Nae Ionescu in order to support the idea of an enlightened dictatorship, Eliade retained the main point, the elitist condition of the creator. From this position he derived his theory of 'creative elites', referring *stricto sensu* to the elites of his generation, as opposed to the older promotion of intellectuals. If Nae Ionescu considered his 'politics' as 'a revolution from the top, downwards'²⁴, Eliade sustained primacy of the spiritual drive and wrote about the 'mental revolution'²⁵ that his generation triggered in the Romanian public. He also highlighted that, not only in politics, but in

²²ibid., p.370.

²³Ionescu, 'Keyserling', Roza..., p.390.

²⁴Ionescu, 'Problema Politicii Noastre de Stat', Roza..., p.288.

²⁵Eliade, 'Generatia in Pulbere', Profetism..., vol. I, p.131.

spiritual/cultural matters, the real revolution is always driven from the top, challenging his readers with the true significance of the word 'revolution':

A real revolution is driven from the top, downwards; never from the bottom, upwards. God made a revolution when He created the world; He revolted against chaos, against non-being... . This is revolution. Jesus was a revolutionary as well. But He descended from on high. Always from on high. The real French revolution was made by the elite, the metaphysicians and the moralists, well before 1789. Again from the top, downwards.²⁶

(Adevărata revoluție se face de sus în jos; niciodată de jos în sus. Revoluție a făcut Dumnezeu creind lumea; s-a revoltat împotriva haosului, neființei; Asta e revoluție. Și Iisus, tot revoluționar a fost. Dar s-a coborât de sus. Intotdeauna de sus. Adevărata revoluție franceză a făcut-o elita, metafizicienii și moralistii, mult înainte de 1789. Tot de sus în jos.)

THE MULTIPLE WORLDS

Analysing Nae Ionescu's philosophy, MacLinscott Ricketts²⁷ remarks on his theory about the three planes of reality: 1) scientific, 2) philosophical and 3) religious; each of them calling for a different method of cognition ('There are several planes of existence, and for each of these realms we must have special means of investigation')²⁸. Also, in one of his articles 'Theologians' Time' Nae Ionescu showed that 'Nothing could be falser in the process of knowledge than the pretension or even the tendency to reduce all reality to what could be seen or measured.' ('Nimic mai

²⁶Eliade, Intoarcerea... (1992), p.193.

²⁷Ricketts, Mircea Eliade..., pp.98-99.

²⁸Ionescu, in Ricketts, Mircea Eliade..., p.99.

fals în procesul cunoașterii decât pretenția sau măcar tendința de a reduce toată realitatea la ceea ce se vede sau se poate măsura.’).²⁹

This viewpoint of Nae Ionescu concerning the **multiple worlds** ‘**behaving differently towards the Absolute**’³⁰ led to the central Eliadean principle that:

Works of art, like ‘religious data’, have a mode of being that is peculiar to themselves; they *exist on their own plane of reference*, in their particular universe. The fact that this universe is not the physical universe of immediate experience does not imply their nonreality.³¹

The best synthesis of this concept in the Eliadean literary oeuvre is his novella ‘Dayan’. A genius in the scientific realm, the main character of the story undergoes an initiatic journey into the philosophical and religious realms to discover his true Self and once he has done so, the ‘ultimate equation’ (the integration of the system Matter-Energy into Space-Time). Dayan also unites, in a symbolic way, the three types of mystical paths we mentioned earlier: **the pilgrimage**, the **ascetic way** and the **divine marriage**. Through pain and mystical love, he acquires the secret of the Absolute. In our opinion, one of the interpretations of this novella could be based on a ‘skeleton’ formed by Nae Ionescu’s philosophical ideas. This perspective enriches the meanings of the text, which remains a masterpiece of Eliade’s thought.

²⁹Ionescu, Op. cit., Roza..., p.318.

³⁰Ionescu, ‘Inviere’, Roza..., p.61.

³¹Eliade, The Quest..., p.6.

SUPRA-INDIVIDUALITY OF LIFE AND MYSTICAL SOLIDARITY WITH ALL CREATURES

Nae Ionescu was an advocate of the supra-individuality of life's powers, the supra-individuality that gives direction and meaning to all happenings. This belief crystallized, in Eliade's work, in the notion of 'predestination', a leitmotif of his fiction. Eliade's characters strive to understand the Reason behind every event in their life and, because of their inability to perceive the whole pattern of their destiny, they feel lost in the existential maze. Those who could 'see' certain 'signs', which act like fragments in a puzzle, stand a chance of gaining access to the whole pattern of events. As understanding is analogous to creation³², they ultimately reach the status of Creator: creators of their own life, in the mystical sense of immersing in transcendency. So, they not only become masters of their destiny, but they are one with God, and all the secrets of the Universe come to be accessible to them. The whole initiatory process to which Eliade subjects his characters is in fact a path from profane to sacred, from the status of Man to God. The notion of 'predestination' is recurrent in the majority of his literary oeuvre ('Miss Christina', 'The Snake', 'At Dionysus' Court', 'A General's Uniforms', 'The Forbidden Forest, Nineteen Roses, etc.).

From this gradual integration of man into transcendency results the mystical solidarity with all creatures of nature. This is another pivotal view in Eliade's fiction and was expressed before by Nae Ionescu in his writing 'Keyserling': 'The conscience of real freedom has its correlation in the feeling of solidarity with all creatures'.³³

³²An idea Nae Ionescu borrowed from Dilthey. See Ricketts, Mircea Eliade..., p.105.

³³Ionescu, Op. cit., Roza..., p.390.

Starting with his early story 'The Snake' and finishing with his last one, 'In the Shadow of a Lily', the paradisiacal communion with God is expressed by Eliade through the emblematic communion with all beings. The young entomologist Valentin (an alter ego of the writer himself), from 'In the Shadow of a Lily', is a 'bearer of messages' from the sacred realm, into the profane world:

... he, Valentin, had caught a blue lizard, he kept it in his palm, and he did not tire of admiring it. And all of a sudden he hears him talking, as if to himself: 'When we are all in Paradise, in the shadow of a lily, I will understand what this lizard tells me now...'³⁴

(... el, Valentin, prinsese o șopârlă albastră, o ținea în palmă, și nu se mai sătura admirând-o. Și deodată îl aude vorbind, mai mult pentru sine: 'Când vom fi cu toții în Rai, la umbra unui crin, o să înțeleg ce-mi spune acum șopârla asta...')

Eliade supported the view that nature with its creatures could act as catalysts towards understanding the other realm and help man 'to be amazed by the splendour of his own existence'.³⁵

THE UNIFICATION OF CHURCHES AND RELIGION AS A NEW HUMANISM

In an article written in 1926 'Ad Maturandum Christianae Unitatis Bonum'³⁶, Nae Ionescu brings into discussion the possibility of

³⁴Eliade, *La Umbra...*, vol. V, p.192.

³⁵ibid., pp.202-03.

³⁶Ionescu, *Op. Cit.*, *Roza...*, pp.202-03.

unification between the Christian Churches (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox)³⁷.

Over the years, Mircea Eliade raised the problem (favourably this time) not only of Unification of Christian religions, but of all the sacred phenomena of the world's religions, in order to understand Man and develop what he called 'a new Humanism':

... *homo religiosus* represents the 'total man'; hence, the science of religions must become a total discipline in the sense that it must use, integrate, and articulate the results obtained by the various methods of approaching a religious phenomenon.³⁸

Although both, teacher and pupil, were concerned with the same problem of unification between religions, they treated the subject in different manners. While Ionescu just commented upon it, as a possibility, for the restricted area of Christianity, it was Eliade's undertaking to make it universal ('For the sacred is a universal dimension')³⁹. Eliade was also the one who shaped the concept of a discipline which he considered best qualified to open the way to a philosophical anthropology: the history of religions.

³⁷He advocated the Orthodox cause as being the religion which best preserved the Christian tradition in its authentic form.

³⁸Eliade, *The Quest...*, p.8.

³⁹*ibid.*, p.8.

2. POINTS OF CONTACT

Nae Ionescu was considered 'an awakener of consciousness'⁴⁰, who, in the pure Socratic tradition, not only taught his students 'to think', but had challenged them with his original ideas. His method was to seed ideas in the minds of his students, who could develop them according to their own spiritual path. As one of his pupils, Mihail Sebastian wrote: 'There are, I think, very few young people who were not marked by Nae Ionescu's writings and teachings' (Sunt, cred, putini tineri pe care scrisul si vorba lui Nae Ionescu sa nu-i fi marcat')⁴¹. Each of Nae Ionescu's disciples (among them were: Emil Cioran, Petre Țuțea, Mircea Vulcănescu, Petre Comarnescu, Mihail Sebastian, Constantin Noica, Mișu Polihroniade), through a continuous process of sublimating their mentor's theories, arrived at a personal creative formula. Eliade followed his own way as well. Although some of Ionescu's ideas are still visible in Eliade's oeuvre, it was the task of the latter to polish them, in order to reveal their full light. We give a further two examples of Ionescu's 'spiritual creeds' which were transformed into philosophical metaphors in Eliade's fiction.

One of Ionescu's convictions was that Divinity could be understood better through what he called 'the technique of stirring up' was considered by Ionescu, the best catalyst of 'understanding'. Quoted by Eliade in his early novel, *Gaudeamus*, Ionescu says: 'The most direct techniques of stirring, of agitation is loss of time: Take a sheet of paper and block it off by scribbling till night comes...' ('Cea mai indicată tehnică

⁴⁰In Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade...*, vol. I, p.95.

⁴¹Quoted by Gabriel Stanescu, 'Cazul Nae Ionescu sau Triumful Spiritului Socratic in Cultura Romaneasca', *Cuvantul Romanesc*, Ontario, Year 23, No 252, October, 1997, pp.10-11.

de tulburare, de neliniștire este pierderea timpului: la o foaie și mângălește-o cu creionul până seara...')⁴². It is difficult not to recognize in these lines the explanation of an apparently absurd episode of Eliade's novel The Forbidden Forest, in which the main hero (Ștefan Viziru) keeps adding colours, at random, on a canvas. It becomes clear that Ștefan employs Ionescu's 'stirring up technique', that is he tries to waste his profane time, in order to enter the timeless dimension of transcendence:

He should have told her that his painting can't be seen, in fact, because it doesn't exist in reality. All that existed was a canvas upon which he endlessly added colours, without any artistic design, but only because this game bewildered him and allowed him to find again, somewhere, very deep in his being, another sort of Time, another type of existence...⁴³

(At fi trebuit să-i spună că pictura lui cu adevărat nu se poate vedea, pentru că, de fapt, nu exista. Nu exista decât o singură pânză pe care el adăuga neconținut culori, fără nici o preocupare artistică, ci numai pentru că jocul acesta îl fermeca, îi îngăduia să regăsească, undeva, foarte adânc în ființa lui, un altfel de Timp, o altfel de existență.)

Another point of contact between the two thinkers is the actor, one of the essential symbols that Eliade employs in his fiction. In an interview he gave to a Romanian poet, Eliade said about Nae Ionescu: 'He taught us to decipher expressions of true thought in stage plays, to consider the theater the *avant garde* of philosophy...'⁴⁴. It is precisely this function of 'carriers' of philosophical ideas and metaphysical truths that the artists perform in Eliade's literary oeuvre.

⁴²Quoted by Sergiu Tofan in Mircea Eliade - Destinul unei profetii (Galați, Ed. Alter Ego Cristian & Ed. Algorithm, 1996), pp.65-66. I eliminated the italics and bold setting.

⁴³Eliade, Noaptea..., vol. I (1971), p.210.

⁴⁴Quoted by Ricketts, Mircea Eliade..., p.125.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Motto: ... he taught us to see things 'differently'; he taught us to feel spring by looking at people, not the trees.

(Mircea Eliade, Interview)

In this chapter we attempted to show the extent to which Nae Ionescu's concepts were influential in Eliade's formative years and how they continued to form a blueprint for the path he took later in life. Many other Eliadean central concepts contain *in nuce*, Ionescu's ideas. MacLinscott Ricketts magisterially proved this in his monograph, when he analysed the acceptations Eliade gave to : patterns and archetypes, 'history' and history of religions, alchemy, symbolism, etc.

Mentor and disciple held certain views in common. Eliade learned from Nae Ionescu, but one should not underestimate the fact that their works bear a certain 'similar touch', mainly because their personalities were similar. Probably, Ionescu would not have chosen Eliade as his main pupil if he had not seen the complementary reflection of his own psyché in him.

SCHOLAR VERSUS WRITER

Motto: If I would write one day and interpretation... of my books, O could show that... there is a fundamental unity of all my writings...

(Mircea Eliade, Autobiography, vol. I, pp.432-33)

As Seymour Cain highlighted, 'For anyone who finds illuminating the notion that literature (art) and scholarship (science) are collaborators in the attainment of knowledge, Mircea Eliade provides an example *par excellence* of the co-working of the two modes.'¹ Over the years the apparent dichotomy of Eliade's oeuvre was the subject of academic debates that reached extremes. Seymour Cain demonstrated that these sort of interpretations are both erroneous: Eliade's fiction ^{was not a violon d'Ingres and he} was not *un savant malgré lui* either². This position was also taken by other scholars like: Norman J. Girardot, Matei Călinescu, Eugen Simion, Adriana Berger, to name but a few. They envisaged Eliade's oeuvre as an organic whole. Matei Calinescu for example underlines this general view:

... the two apparently independent lines of activity that Eliade had pursued uninterruptedly since the late 1920s as a scholar and as a fiction writer have so many points in common and are so mutually illuminating, that they ought to be given equal attention by anyone who wishes to apprehend Eliade's personality as a whole'.³

¹Seymour Cain, 'Poetry and Truth: the Double Vocation in Eliade's Journals and Other Autobiographical Writings, Imagination and Meaning... , p.100.

²ibid., p.92.

³Calinescu, ' "The Function of the Unreal" ...', Imagination and Meaning..., p.139.

While academicians had published theoretical studies and articles on the subject, the need of actually showing over the texts the relationship between Eliade's scientific books and the literary ones arose. Along with proposing a 'tool' for a new hermeneutic of Eliade's works, this is precisely what the current thesis is trying to do. But before expressing our view we will show several opinions of the *academia* on this matter. Researchers mainly tried to 'reconcile' the double activity of Mircea Eliade by finding a common ground for both aspects and acknowledging (along with Eliade himself) the role of the imaginative in the world of learning. It was said that the historian of religions seeks:

... general patterns of meaning, spiritual realities that are to be discerned in the facticity of historical and ethnological documents through the shaping imagination of the inquiring interpreter. Knowledge... is not a matter of photographic verisimilitude of logical analysis, but of *poiesis*, of a making and shaping that in certain ways is analogous to that of the writer or artist.⁴

Interpreters like Adriana Berger even saw in Eliade's activity as scholar and writer a consequence of his integrative vision of the world, a 'desire for unity' within the *coincidentia oppositorum* ('it is a matter of reconciling two apparently conflicting aspects, the letters and the sciences, within the *coincidentia oppositorum*, which is 'one of the most archaic manners by which the paradox of the divine reality expressed itself'.)⁵ Others, like Norman J. Girardot showed that Eliade's yin and yang of history and fiction represent 'his attempts to recapture for himself and others exiled in modern history the more meaningful rhythm of a religious interpretation of human experience'⁶. To sum up, novel and myth were considered as 'articulated successions of images

⁴Cain, 'Poetry and Truth'..., p.98.

⁵Berger, 'Eliade's Double Approach...', pp.9-12.

⁶Girardot, 'Imagining Eliade...', p.9.

and symbols' in a narrative structure common to both'⁷, and consequently the idea of a real dichotomy between religion and fiction was rejected. Eliade himself pointed out the literary value of the historian of religions' material and the characteristic of the 'unrecognizability of the sacred' or the creation of parallel, imaginary universes, both of which are inherent to myth and fiction. He acknowledged the fact that the 'epic literature' (novel, novella, short story) is not liable to disappear as 'the literary imagination prolongs the mythologic creativity and the oneiric experience'.⁸ An interesting position was taken by the literary critic Eugen Simion who distinguished in Eliade's work two categories of books: the ones starting from the sacred and moving towards the profane (from myth to scientific interpretation) and those starting from profane events and continuing by suggesting the permanence of sacred events (literary works).⁹ Simion interprets Eliade's fiction as a 'redeeming force':

The activity of the common man is, without his knowing it, freighted with old rituals. Archetypes preside over his monotonous existence. Without saying so directly, Mircea Eliade thinks, basically of literature as a *redeeming force*... . It puts man again in connection with the great universe and gives him back his cosmic vocation.¹⁰

After this brief review of the main opinions on Eliade's activity as scholar and writer we can admit that religion and fiction have a common ground, the same way mathematics is - as Frye showed - 'the purest example of the constructive imagination at work'¹¹. While

⁷Matei Calinescu, 'Imagination and Meaning: Aesthetic Attitudes and Ideas in Mircea Eliade's Thought', Journal of Religion, 1977, vol.57, pp.1-15.

⁸Eliade, Jurnal..., vol. II, p.288.

⁹Simion, 'The Mythical Dignity...', p.133.

¹⁰ibid., p.136.

¹¹Quoted by Cain in 'Poetry and Truth...', p.99.

agreeing with the current views that express the inevitable influence of the scientific concepts of Eliade upon his fiction - a position which we try to evidence in other ways in the present thesis - our view opposes the idea (unrealistic and consequently still unproved) according to which Eliade's literary imagination was a key factor in the writing of his scientific works. By way of analogy we could at most suppose that the role played by the former in his research is the one of the falling apple in Newton's theory of gravitational law. It was said that 'Eliade's "myth of the eternal return" or "Cosmic Tree" cannot be verified simply by returning to an appraisal of the documentary materials'¹², but Eliade himself emphasized many times that he searched for the understanding of the coherent, ultimate, meaning of certain phenomena and symbols and tried to 'decode' their true significance in their context, which is lost in the contemporary society. Writing about his tendency to search for the spiritual side, for the symbolistic and internal coherence of the religious phenomena, Eliade underlined its reasons: '... it is not because I would deny or minimize the other aspects - material, economic, historical, etc. - but because these seem evident to me, while the spiritual side "must be read in filigree". And again, already so much was written about the exterior aspects, often parasitic, of the religious phenomenon...'¹³. Conscious mentality changed, and Eliade undertakes to withdraw those archaic meanings that still lay deep down modern man's unconscious and, while making them conscious, understand their logic. For this to be carried out, not only strict comparative work and documentary information is needed (and, in this respect, Eliade excelled), but also insight and intuition. As Adrian Marino noticed, Eliade's encounter with the mentality of the traditional cultures (where

¹²Cain, 'Poetry and Truth...', p.98.

¹³Quoted by Adrian Marino in Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade (Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Dacia, 1980), p.100.

all the human acts are doubled by a 'symbolic' meaning that transfigures them) has the character of an *anamnesis*.¹⁴ Those researchers who promote the absolute primacy of the document do not fulfil their reader's expectations and in a way give 'half the facts' (by not explaining the meanings into context and their archaic symbolic significations).¹⁵ And as our contemporaries remain 'opaque' even to, let us say Góngora's¹⁶ poems without a glossary of terms, Eliade's attempt to make archaic universes intelligible is all the more relevant.

¹⁴Marino, *Hermeneutica...*, p.43.

¹⁵See also the excellent analysis of the textual intentionality, done by Marino in *Hermeneutica...*

¹⁶Góngora y Argote, Spanish lyric poet, wrote in an entirely novel style, which his followers designated the '*stilo culto*'.

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